THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

CC 02057

160 pages

Mystery Magazine®

FEBRUARY 11, 1980
#436
$1.35
UK70p

12 stories— 11 NEW

REX STOUT
(about NERO WOLFE)

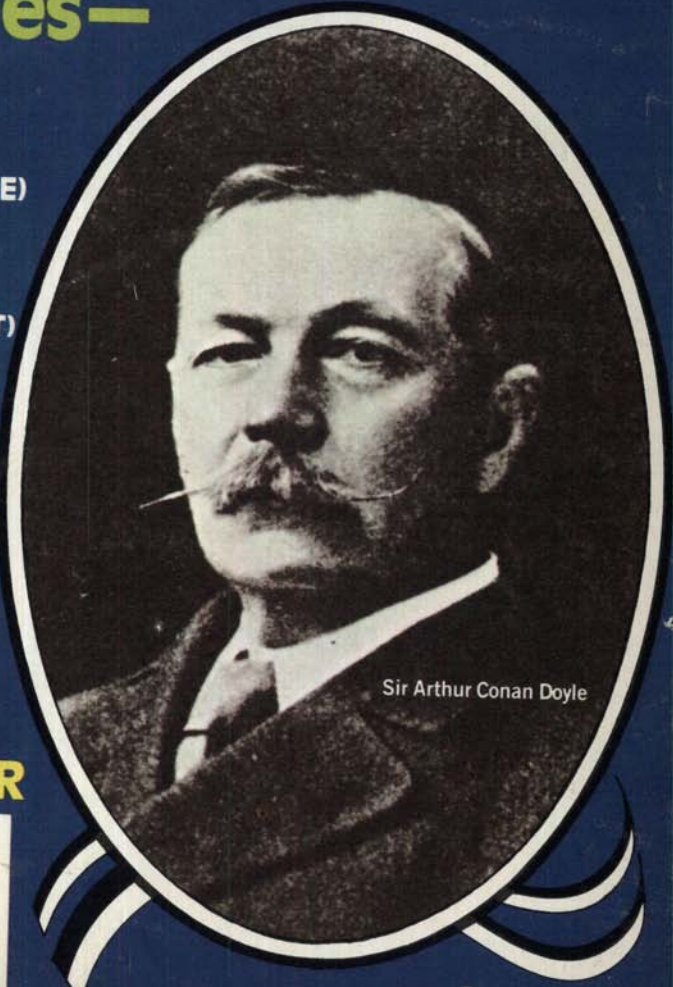
EDWARD D. HOCH
(about NICK VELVET)

ROBERT L.

CK

IE
ES)

Y
TTER



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

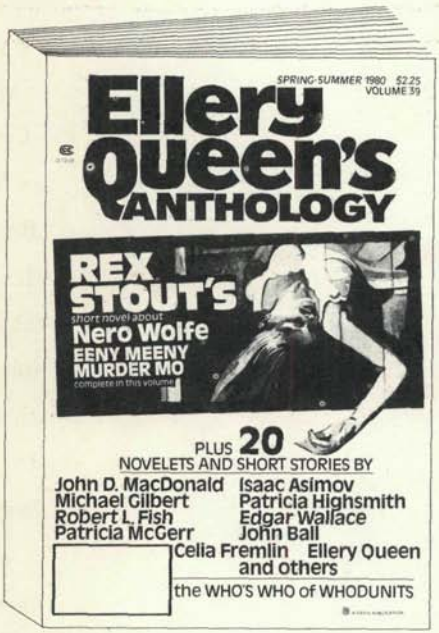
27 43 4528 ROY66TRH02 NOV81
PROF HALSEY ROYDEN
13466 THREE FORKS
LOS ALTOS HLS CA 94022

06
71486 02057

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The hardcover version of this superb collection of mystery stories is titled "Ellery Queen's Veils of Mystery." We invite you to enjoy it all in this paperback edition–The SPRING/SUMMER '80 EQ ANTHOLOGY.



You'll save $7.05 over the hardbound edition.

●

1 Short Novel
2 Novelets
18 Short Stories

●

EXTRA COUPON ON PAGE 24

Ellery Queen's Mystery Anthology #39
380 Lexington Avenue, New York NY 10017

☐ Enclosed is $2.25 plus 65¢ shipping/handling (total of $2.90) for EQA #39, Spring/Summer '80 edition.

Name_____
(please print)

Street/No._____ Apt. No._____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Q21180

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Next Issue On Sale February 12 **ISSN: 0013-6328**

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine ®

TIMES CHANGE	Bill Pronzini	4
ARABIAN NIGHTS IN FEZ	MacLean O'Spelin	8
A FISH STORY	Dorothy A. Collins	22
THE NEXT WITNESS	Rex Stout	25
DR. TEMPLE IS DEAD	William Bankier	75
THE ADVENTURE OF THE PATIENT RESIDENT	Robert L. Fish	80
THE GLASS SLIPPER MURDER	Betty Jochmans	97
TWILIGHT	Sharon Johnson	103
ON THE CB	Jack Polk	105
SAFE AND FREE	D. O. Bell	115
RAFFLES IN LOVE	Barry Perowne	124
THE THEFT OF THE BANKER'S ASHTRAY	Edward D. Hoch	143
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER	Otto Penzler & Chris Steinbrunner	90
THE JURY BOX	Jon L. Breen	94

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 75, No. 2, Whole No. 436, February 11, 1980. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.35 a copy. Annual subscription $16.25 in U.S.A. and possessions; $18.50 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017, (212) 557-9100. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06835. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing offices. *© 1979 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE ® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

ELEANOR SULLIVAN, *Managing Editor* — CONSTANCE DIRIENZO, *Exec. Sec., Rts. & Perm. Mgr.* BARBARA BAZYN, *Assistant Editor* — ELANA LORE, *Assistant Editor* VICTOR C. STABILE, *Vice Pres. & Treas.* — LEONARD F. PINTO, *Vice Pres. & General Manager* JIM CAPPELLO, *Advertising Mgr.* — CARL BARTEE, *Production Dir.* — IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art Dir.* DON GABREE, *Newsstand Circ. Dir.* — R.V. ENLOW, *Sub. Circ. Dir.* — EUGENE SLAWSON, *Asst. Sub. Circ. Dir.* B. G. DAVIS, *President, Chairman of the Board (1957-1972)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TIMES CHANGE

by BILL PRONZINI

The big flat-faced stranger came into the Elite Barber Shop just before closing that Wednesday afternoon.

Asa was stropping his old Spartacus straight razor, humming to himself and thinking how good a cold lemonade was going to taste. Over at the shoeshine stand Leroy Heavens sat on a three-legged stool, working on his own pair of brogans with a stained cloth; sweat lacquered his face and made it glisten like black onyx. The mercury in the courthouse thermometer had been up to 97 at high noon and Asa judged it wasn't much cooler than that right now: the summer flies were still heat-drugged, floating in circles on such breeze as the ceiling fan stirred up.

In the long mirror across the rear wall Asa watched the stranger shut the door and stand looking around. Leroy and the shoeshine stand got a passing glance; so did the three 1920s Otis barber chairs, the waiting-area furniture, the open door to Asa's living quarters in back, the counter full of clippers and combs and other tonsorial tools, and the display shelves of both modern and old-fashioned grooming supplies.

When the eyes flicked over him Asa said, "Sure is a hot one," by way of greeting. "That sun'll raise blisters, a person stands under it too long."

The big man didn't say anything. Just headed across to where Asa was standing behind the number one chair. He wore a loose-fitting summer shirt and a pair of spiffy cream-colored slacks; dark green-tinted sunglasses hid his eyes. Asa took him to be somewhere in his middle fifties, reckoning from the lines in his face. Some face it was, too: looked as though somebody had beat on it with a mallet to flatten it that way, to get the nose and lips all spread out and shapeless.

The display shelves were to the left of the number one chair; the stranger stopped there and peered down at the old-fashioned supplies. He picked up and inspected a silvertip-badger shaving brush, an ironstone mug, a block of crystal alum, a bottle of imported

© 1979 by Bill Pronzini.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

English lavender water. The left corner of his mouth bent upward in a sort of smile.

"Nice stuff you got here," he said, and Asa knew right off that he was from up North. New York, maybe; he had that kind of damn-yankee accent you kept hearing on the TV. "Not too many places stock it nowadays."

"That's a fact," Asa agreed. "I'm just about the only barber in Hallam County that does."

"Sell much of it?"

"Nope, not much. Had that silvertip brush two years now; got a genuine tortoiseshell handle, too. Kind of a shame nobody wants it."

The stranger made a noise through his flattened nose. "Doesn't surprise me. All anybody wants these days is modern junk, modern ideas. People'd be a lot better off if they stuck to the old ways."

"Well," Asa said philosophically, "things change."

"Not for the better."

"Oh, I dunno. Sometimes I reckon they do." Asa laid the Spartacus razor down. "But sure not in the art of shaving. Now that silvertip there—a real fine piece of craftsmanship, handmade over in France. Make you a nice price on it if you're interested."

"Maybe," the big man said. He edged away from the shelves and went over by the open inner door. When he got there he paused and seemed to take inventory of the room beyond. "You live back there, old-timer?"

"I do."

"Alone?"

"Yep. You a census-taker, maybe?"

The stranger barked once, like a hound on a possum hunt; then he came back to where Asa was and looked up at the clock above the mirror. "Almost five," he said. "Sign out front says that's when you close up."

"Most days the sign's right."

"How about today?"

"If you're asking will I still barber you, the answer's yes. Ain't my policy to turn a customer away if he's here before closing."

"Any after-hours appointments?"

Asa's brows pulled down. "I don't take after-hours appointments," he said. "Haircut what you're after, is it? Looks a mite long over the collar."

No answer. The big man turned his head and looked over at the front window, where the shade was three-quarters drawn against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the glare of the afternoon sun. About all you could see below it was half of the empty sidewalk outside.

Asa ran a hand through his sparse white hair. Seemed pretty quiet in there, all of a sudden, except for the whisper of the push-broom Leroy had fetched and was sweeping up with in front of the shoeshine stand. There was hardly a sound out on Willow Street, either. Folks kept to home and indoors in this heat; hadn't been much foot or machine traffic all day, and no business to speak of.

"Don't recall seeing you around Wayville before," Asa said to the stranger. "Just passing through, are you?"

"You might say that."

"Come far?"

"Far enough. The state capital."

"Nice place, the capital."

"Sure. Lots of things happening there, right? Compared to a one-horse town like this, I mean."

"Depends on how you look at it."

"For instance," the big man said, "I heard there was some real excitement over there just last week. And I heard this barber named Asa Bedloe, from Wayville here, was mixed up in it."

Asa hesitated. Then, "Now where'd a yankee like you hear that?"

The stranger's lip bent upward at the corner again. "The way I got it, Asa was in the capital visiting his nephew. While the nephew was at work, Asa wandered downtown to look through some secondhand bookstores because he likes to read. He took a short cut through an alley, heard two guys arguing inside an open doorway, and the next thing he knew, there was a shot and one guy came running out with a gun in his hand. Asa'd already ducked out of sight, so the guy didn't see him. But Asa, he got a good look at the guy's face. He went straight to the cops and picked him out of a mug book—and what do you know, the guy's name is Rawles and he's a medium bigshot in the local rackets. So the cops are happy because they've got a tight eyewitness murder rap against Rawles, and Asa's happy because he's a ten-cent hero. The only one who isn't happy is Rawles."

Asa wet his lips. His eyes stayed fixed on the stranger's face.

"What I can't figure out," the big man went on, "is why old Asa went to the cops in the first place. I mean, why didn't he just keep his mouth shut and forget the whole thing?"

"Maybe he reckoned it was his duty," Asa said.

"Duty." The stranger shook his head. "That's another modern

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

idea: instead of staying the hell out of things that don't concern them, everybody wants to do his duty, wants to get involved. Like I said before, people'd be better off if they stuck to the old ways."

"The old ways ain't always the right ways."

"Too bad you feel that way, old-timer," the stranger said. He glanced up at the clock again. "After five now. Time to close up."

"I ain't ready to close up just yet."

"Sure you are. Go on over and lock the front door."

"Now you listen here—"

The sly humor disappeared from the big man's face like somebody had wiped it off with an eraser. His eyes said he was through playing games. And his actions said it even plainer: he reached down, hiked up the front of his loose-fitting shirt, and closed his big paw around the butt of a handgun stuck inside his belt.

"Lock the front door," he said again. "Then go over with the shoeshine boy—"

That was as far as he got.

Because by this time Leroy had come catfooting up behind him. And in the next second Leroy had one arm curled around his neck, his head jerked back, and the muzzle of a .44 Magnum pressed against his temple.

"Take the gun out and drop it," Leroy said. "Slow and careful, just use your thumb and forefinger."

The big man didn't have much choice. Asa watched him do what he'd been told. The look on his face was something to see—all popeyed and scrunched up with disbelief. He hadn't hardly paid any mind to Leroy since he walked in, and sure never once considered him to be listening and watching, much less to be a threat.

Leroy backed the two of them up a few paces. Then he said, "Asa, take charge of his gun. And then go ring up my office."

"Yes, sir, you bet."

The stranger said, "Office?"

"Why, sure. This fella's been pretending to work here for the past couple days, bodyguarding me ever since the capital police got wind Rawles had hired himself a professional gunman. Name's Leroy Heavens—*Sheriff* Leroy Heavens. First black sheriff in the history of Hallam County."

The big man just gawped at him.

Asa grinned as he bent to pick up the gun. "Looks like I was right and you were wrong, mister," he said. "Sometimes things change for the better, all right. Sometimes they surely do."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* espionage story by

MacLEAN O'SPELIN

Another adventure of O'Spelin, the sophisticated spy who alternates between exciting exploits in exotic places and peaceful interludes of fly fishing in far-off streams . . . This tale of a Sultan's palace, a harem courtyard, of the fragrance industry and secret formulas, of glowing copper and brass, hanging carpets, luxurious cushions, and inviting beds, of clandestine skulduggery, will remind you of magic lamps and bottled jinn—in a phrase, of a thousand and one nights entertainments . . .

ARABIAN NIGHTS IN FEZ

by MacLEAN O'SPELIN

I've always liked Fez. And its Hotel Mamounia.

So it wasn't heartrending when I had to stop trout fishing in the Moyen Atlas mountains in central Morocco, pack my Holbrook rods and Hardy reels, whirl the hired Lamborghini Miura down the cool slopes and out onto the hot desert plain, and check in at the Mamounia. Not heartrending, no, but still a wrench.

My profession is industrial espionage, but my passion is fly fishing. The first supports the second plus other lesser but often costly indulgences. I prefer the indulgences to working. But my funds were running perilously low.

So work it had to be. And sooner than I'd planned. Which fact touched off a series of male-female, masculine-feminine mixups that would have daunted the earliest bird.

Originally, the Mamounia had been a minor sultan's palace. A cautious fellow, he'd had it built for safety's sake right into the wall around the medina of Fez. If you're not sure what a medina is, think of a kasbah—come weez me to zee kasbah, cherie—and you'll have the idea.

Oh, there are differences. But they're irrelevant to this tale. Both the medina and the kasbah have thick walls and, inside, a web of labyrinthine passageways linking a jammed-in hodgepodge of Arab

© *1979 by MacLean O'Spelin.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dwellings, both rich and poor, artisans' ateliers, merchants' stalls, and in Fez's case the ancient Karouine Mosque.

The Fez medina is vast and right out of the Arabian Nights. Visitors are not barred. But don't expect a magic carpet or even a red one. There are occasional donkeys but no cars; if you want a tranquil stroll, better hire a trustworthy guide.

The Mamounia is small but deluxe. It, too, is a labyrinth and a guide can be useful. Mine was Monsieur le Directeur himself, a suave young Moroccan in tailor-made suit and white boutonnière. "Welcome, Monsieur O'Spelin—no, it is of no consequence that you are ahead of time."

He guided me along richly carpeted, romantically dimlit corridors that turned and re-turned at apparent random. We padded up and down short flights of stairs. The small raised numbers on the doors we passed were hard to see and seemed to have no logical sequence.

But we made it safely. M. le Directeur celebrated by bowing me into the two-room suite at the top of the Sultan's Tower and I slipped him an appreciative wad of Moroccan dirhams which he suavely made dematerialize. I looked a question at him, he held up a warning palm, crossed the room, and unplugged a hammered brass lamp on an inlaid table.

"Bugs in the brasswork, eh, Hamad?" I said and he showed perfect teeth and made a coarse gesture. "Merde à la Sûreté, Mac. Merde aux cops."

"Betcha," I said. "Find al-Fassi and send him up the back way, will you, please. And let me have a master key as usual and patch my telephone around the switchboard directly into a trunk line."

"No sweat." Grinning at his mastery of Yankee slang, he handed over a big key. Then he pointed a forefinger at me and waggled his thumb. "Bang, bang!"

Hamad was a useful contact, so I laughed politely although I seldom enjoyed his jokes as much as he did. His admirable contempt for the Sûreté was no joke though; he relished thwarting them even though he could scarcely refuse if police routine called for bugged rooms and tapped switchboards in all hotels.

Beckoning me, he went to a window. The Sultan's Tower was squatter than most towers, but its perch atop the slope of the medina toward the River Fez gave it the illusion of towering. I gazed down over the tightly packed jumble of buildings, gripped by this look back over turbulent centuries.

"No, no, Mac. Directly below."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the foot of the tower, perhaps 30 feet down, was an interior walled patio. I remembered that the hotel's brochure boasted of a harem courtyard built for the Sultan's ladies to take the air unseen by any eyes but his.

Maybe it was true—anyway, there was a lady there now. Taking the air and the midafternoon sun. On a lounge chair, wearing an eyeshield and a one-piece swimsuit that was modest in our string-bikini and nude-bathing world.

But not so modest that it left her lovely torso completely to the imagination. The swimsuit's black matched her long hair and complemented the bronze of her lithe body perfectly. From that angle I couldn't appraise her face systematically, but I was sure its quality matched the rest. Rating: Knockout.

"Madame la Generale Fouchette, Mac. Just your type."

"Thanks. She's staying here?"

"Partly. That is, she was born in the medina and maintains a pied-à-terre there. But whenever she's in Fez she reserves the room with the courtyard. Often she dines here, now and then spends the night."

Thus began the male-female thing I warned you of. Also the masculine-feminine thing. I've lost many battles with grammatical gender in French, but I did know that the feminine title "Madame la Generale" did not mean that the woman was a female general. It meant that she was a general's wife.

"Her husband is attached to the French Embassy in Rabat and is now on an observation mission on the Algerian border. The lady is lonely, perhaps."

"Hamad, I follow you like a medina mugger. You'll see to it that I'm seated close to her table if she's dining here tonight?"

"No sweat."

I have a pied-à-terre of my own, a five-room pad on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco. Also a twin engine Cessna, fishing camps here and there around the world, a Pantera and a classic BMW 2800 CS and so on. Not many of these playthings are fully paid for. So my cash flow turns negative often, and I have to go to work. Like now.

I left the tantalizing view, got rid of M. le Directeur, and after giving him time to bypass the switchboard taps, telephoned Le Domaine Bigard. M. Louis Bigard, I learned, was in residence although not immediately available.

Good. Bigard spent much of his time at his factory in Grasse in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

southern France and our appointment wasn't for three days yet. Time saved already.

Al-Fassi arrived, we pounded each other's backs, and he told me how his huge family was and I told him how fishing had been. Burlier than most Moroccans, he had a big round face that could beam like the desert sun at dawn. I'd known him for years and trusted him as much as anyone I knew.

The name al-Fassi means "from Fez," and my friend was always up to date on Fezian affairs. Le Domaine Bigard, he told me, still farmed thousands of hectares and was still operated by the parent company, Parfums Bigard.

I already knew that Louis Bigard was top man because I won't deal with anyone but the Chief Executive Officer, the CEO, in any concern, but I didn't know much else about him. Al-Fassi filled me in: a realist, dishonest or honest as the case required; confident to the point of arrogance; fiercely jealous of Parfums Bigard's international reputation; highly conscious of his exalted position; rough on subordinates.

Fine. Characteristics common to your average hard-nosed half-a-million-a-year-plus-fringes CEO of any nationality. Nobody is worth that kind of money, but those who get it are, I've found, easier to deal with than, say, your average vice president. More decisive. Easier—though not easy—to convince that, as a top professional, I was worth the high fees I charged.

I sent al-Fassi off to rent a car less conspicuous than the Lamborghini and to locate Bigard, give him the verbal recognition signal he and I'd agreed on, and set up a meeting at some suitably private spot.

I went back to the window. Madame la Generale had removed the eyeshield, turned on one side, and was reading a book. Long tapering legs. Classic arch to her hip. Distracting. Too distracting. I turned away.

I unpacked, showered, lay down on the bed to review what I knew about what some call "the smell game." Or, as those in it prefer, "the fragrance industry." Either way, it does smell. Good and bad. Hyacinth, sandalwood, jasmine smell good. Glandular secretions of musk deer and civet cat smell bad. Some of the game's end products smell delightful. Some of its business practices smell rank.

Which is where I and other industrial spooks come in. Caesars sloshed themselves with scent, Pharaohs too. Then and now, every flower grower, hunter of musk and ambergris, distiller of floral or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

animal oils, blender and bottler had his secret processes. Secrets spawn spies.

Using natural ingredients, the French used to dominate the market. Now, using mainly synthetics, the Americans were making deep inroads . . . Yawning, I tried to guess Madame la Generale's preference, and drifted off to sleep . . .

Louis Bigard sported boots, breeches, riding crop. But a Mercedes SL, not an Arab stallion, was tethered alongside the field-machinery shed where al-Fassi dropped me after threading the rented Fiat through miles of the Domaine's geranium plants. And, yes, Bigard sported a subtly masculine scent.

"O'Spelin? *L'espion*?" he said, nostrils flaring as if O'Spelin the Spy would also benefit from a dollop or two from a Parfums Bigard bottle.

Affably I said, "Here to lie, bribe, and steal for you, monsieur."

Recoiling, he tightened his grip on the crop. But like most CEOs he could face the facts of business life. Recovering quickly, he got down to cases.

Western Flavors & Fragrances of New York's new scent, J'Excite ($130 per oz.), was a whirlwind smash hit. My job was to get the formula.

J'Excite, he admitted grudgingly, did smell good. But, by duplicating the formula's synthetics with natural ingredients, Parfums Bigard would have a scent so tenderly aphrodisiacal that it would demolish J'Excite.

Now, American fragrance companies are so security-conscious they barred TV's pertinacious crew when they tried to do a job on the perfume business. So this op was no pushover—a theme I developed at great length until Bigard agreed to a fee I deemed suitable for delivery of the formula, plus a hefty non-refundable advance against expenses—which would be high.

He didn't have enough cash with him, and as I wanted enough technical information to keep me from being slipped a recipe for jasmine tea by some totally dishonest WF&F employee, we agreed to another meeting later that night.

I felt downright cheery when al-Fassi stopped the Fiat a few hundred yards from the Mamounia. I'd soon have enough cash for my immediate bills; I had solid contacts in the smell game; I was in time for cocktails before dinner; and I had hopes concerning Madame la Generale.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But operational security came first; so, before walking to the hotel, I passed al-Fassi the master key for use on the inconspicuous doorways the Sultan had had notched into his palace walls so he could fade into the medina if outside invaders thirsted for his blood or flee in the other direction if his own subjects took a notion to parade his head on a spear.

The barroom was *intime,* the barman knew his business. But I doubted that Madame would drop in. Only the most audacious Moslem woman would dally in public with alcohol or a man not her husband. So I sat where I could watch the entrance to the dining room, and I was on my second martini when Hamad appeared suavely escorting a woman wearing a floor-length jellabah, hood and veil. They disappeared into the dining room; when Hamad reappeared he gave me a high sign.

I downed my drink and he led me to a table three away from where the jellabahed woman sat. "Closer," I whispered.

The misplaced comic winked. "Trust me, Mac."

I glared at him and sat down, inwardly fuming. The food was good, though, and the wine, a Moroccan cabernet, excellent. I relaxed and covertly watched Madame. Her eyes were dark liquid, made enormous by some modern version of kohl. As she ate she manipulated the veil, royal blue like her jellabah, so adroitly I got only an impression of aristocratically molded nose and mouth.

As if at the rub of a magic lamp, Hamad materialized to escort her out when she had finished. As she drew near, I looked deep into those eyes—did an ember of interest glow warmly there?

Suddenly Hamad swerved to avoid a scurrying waiter, jarring Madame off balance. Whirling into a pirouette of apologies, Hamad contrived a maneuver that knocked over my glass. I leaped up as the wine found my legs.

Oozing excuses, Hamad swabbed at me with a napkin. Madame murmured quick, soft apologies. Before I quite realized what was happening, Hamad had shunted us into a small private dining room furnished, Moroccan style, with low table, thickly woven rugs, and plenty of luxurious cushions.

"Unforgivably clumsy of me, Monsieur . . .?"

"O'Spelin. MacLean O'Spelin," I said as her hand touched my forearm sympathetically. "My fault entirely. My chair must have been jutting—"

"Oh, no, monsieur, the fault was mine." We went on like that for a few moments and then Hamad reappeared magically bearing a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blanket, a towel, and a pair of trousers I recognized as mine. Damn good planning, I had to concede as he screened me with the blanket while I changed. A waiter produced brandy for me, mint tea for her. He and Hamad vanished.

I arranged cushions; she loosened her veil slightly. I played it slow and easy, making a leading comment or two, and touching her hand when pouring tea. She made no return signals. But she made no move toward leaving until, regretfully, I had to call it quits or miss my meeting with Bigard.

I escorted her to her room—followed her lead, more accurately. Up, left, down, left again, right, and so on. There's something about following a well-made woman in a well-cut jellabah. They don't hang like tents as men's do, but such formless things should be sexless. Not so, somehow. Hints of hidden treasures?

At her door she held out her hand. I took it, there was a fleeting pressure, and she was gone. Scarcely erotic, but I was satisfied with progress to date.

I wandered a bit but finally got back to my room. Al-Fassi was waiting and I retrieved the big key, then we left the hotel by an almost invisible door.

After the expense money changed hands, Bigard instructed me loftily on the difference between floral oils and fixative oils, on the rudiments of the distilling process (a ton of flowers yields a pound of oil), and other facts. I tried to set up a contact plan with him for my return, but he insisted on the security of an indirect transfer of formula and final payment.

It wasn't crucial, and frankly I'd seen enough of M. le CEO. Via al-Fassi, I'd signal my return; Bigard would send back contact instructions for me with a cutout of his choice. He didn't trust us—fair enough.

When al-Fassi dropped me off, I peeled some bills from my new roll for him, said good night, and sauntered to the hotel's front entrance. It was always locked at that hour but instead of waking the concierge I let myself in. Like a genie from a bottle, Hamad appeared, pretending not to be eaten with curiosity as to how I'd fared with Madame. I gave him some dirhams for a job well done but, as he walked along with me toward my room, I ignored his hints for a blow-by-blow account. Giving up at the short corridor leading to my door, he said, "Gotta split, Mac. Sweet dreams of heavenly houris."

Damn clown. I unlocked the heavy door and felt for the switch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Before I found it the bedlight snapped on. There, sitting up in my bed, was Madame la Generale Fouchette, bare bosom gleaming. By God, I thought, smiling at her silkily, this *will* be an Arabian Night.

It was my last smile for a time. Clutching the sheet to her chin, eyes blazing like obsidian on fire, she loosed a volley of Arabic that rocked me onto my heels. A flanking volley caught me in a crossfire as a nightgowned maidservant burst in from the other room.

In Arabic, Madame snapped at her. Instantly she subsided. In French, Madame snapped at me, "How dare you presume—leave! Leave at once."

My lower jaw subsided. Blankly I gaped around the room, then back at Madame gracing my bed. Problem was, it wasn't my bed.

Sort of wigwagging my hands, I retreated, stammering, "M–mille pardons, ma–madame. *Erreur, erreur.*"

Debonair as a sneak thief with the shakes, I groped for the door, slunk around it, eased it shut. Damn that gag-happy, low-comedy camel of a Hamad!

When I reached the lobby he was gone and I'd regained some of what I like to think of as my usual aplomb. Hell, maybe the idiot had thought he was doing me a favor.

This time, without him along to steer me subtly the wrong way, I paid attention to my route. The master key was still in my hand but before using it I verified the room number. My room, my bed, thank God. Sleep came slowly, though, so I conjured up a picture of Madame in my—in her bed. Gleaming bosom, yes, of course. But hadn't I seen the ghost of a smile just before I'd slunk out? Yes? No? No—I must have imagined it.

Before I left for New York the next day, I informed Hamad what I thought of him (he denied everything), arranged for the hotel to garage the Lamborghini, and wrote a message of apology to Madame—*erreur, erreur.*

In New York it took me a day, through a solid source in a petrochemical firm that supplied WF&F, to get a fix on a knowledgeable target individual there, then another day to manufacture an accidental encounter with him.

A harried, rumpled, likable Assistant Chemist. I wined and dined him. In a week he seemed ripe. Over a fine meal at Box Tree I propositioned him.

No, he wouldn't sell the formula. Yes, he had four kids to send to college, yes, he had a first and second mortgage and high-interest loans on two cars that needed replacing, but no, no, no.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I sensed that he had another problem, though, a trickier one. It took me three days to worm out the admission that a key ingredient in WF&F's hot new J'Excite was rhodinal, a floral oil made from flowers, not petroleum. He simply hadn't been able to come up with a substitute. He was paid to create synthetics. He had failed. He was scared stiff he'd lose his job if he admitted his failure.

To protect his family's livelihood, he'd arranged a clandestine supply of rhodinal. I admired his enterprise and told him so.

Because of his position, he had no problem working rhodinal into the blend. But the synthetics-oriented U.S.A. didn't produce enough of the proper type of geranium. He was down close to the bottom of his hidden rhodinal vat.

I knew where there were miles of geraniums, the right kind. If I could assure him a steady supply, would he trade that for the J'Excite formula?

He stewed for a couple more days, growing even more rumpled. Finally, over dinner at Le Cygne, he capitulated. I left for Morocco the next day.

At the Mamounia I growled at Hamad to find al-Fassi and when he showed, I sent him off to tell Louis Bigard that he and I must meet because, although I had what he wanted, there were ramifications.

Bigard balked, implying to al-Fassi that I was simply trying to squeeze him for more money. Instead, he stuck to the original plan and sent me a curt note with contact arrangements: "*J'ai choisi une personne qui sera au Cocktail Mamounia vers sept heures ce soir. Elle portera quelque chose de rouge.*" The person he had chosen would be in the Mamounia bar about seven this evening. She'd be wearing something red.

She. *Elle.* Surprising. But okay with me. He had more at stake than I, so he'd select somebody he rated A-1 in the trustworthy department. The recognition signal was amateurish, any female might wear something red. But she'd be alone, so all I risked was an icy stare if I braced the wrong woman.

I hit the bar about five to seven. There were a couple of male singles, no female, so I sat where I could watch the entrance. Just as my martini arrived, Hamad entered, dapper as ever in dinner jacket and boutonnière. He started my way but a self-styled prankster was the last person I wanted around now. Ferociously I scowled him off. He paused, seemed about to come on again, when, fortunately, my contact appeared, hesitating in the doorway.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brushing past Hamad I approached the woman although not with my usual aplomb. But she had to be the one. She was a she (definitely). She was alone. Her jellabah was a soft carmine, accented by a veil of a slightly lighter tone. My heavenly houri, spiced with red.

Bigard's houri, rather. For him to choose her as go-between, their connection had to be very close. As if she were his mistress of long standing. Disappointing. I'd have credited Madame la Generale with far better taste.

She took my hand to draw me away from the doorway. "I have received the message. We have many things to discuss, you and I. Come, please."

Once again I found myself in her room. But this time she was so close that her body touched my side as she whispered, "We cannot talk here, we are not really alone." She gestured at the room. "The ears of the police."

"I understand," I said, a little hoarsely. "Where?"

The great eyes glinted conspiratorially. "In one hour come to my medina home. Here, I have written the route."

Gently she pushed me toward the door. Outside, I drew a deep breath. Clandestine operating at its best, by God! Seductive fragrances (hers was jasmine—real). A beautiful veiled temptress-cut-out. Secret formulas. A rendezvous in the depths of a Moorish medina. Come weeze me to zee kasbah, keed.

Al-Fassi was standing by in my room; he too was surprised. He'd never heard Madame's name linked with Bigard's in medina gossip. "*Très discret.*"

Her husband was not so discreet, he added. The General was notorious for the girls he had cached from Marrakesh to Tangier. Who could blame a beautiful wife for a discreet arrangement of her own?

Al-Fassi could easily follow her directions, he said, but even though it was dark and a fine rain was falling, my Western face and clothes were not advisable. Big face beaming, he made for the door. "I shall produce the cloak of invisibility, O sublime master." Another gag-a-minute Moroccan comic.

When he returned, I removed my jacket and he engulfed me in an enormous hooded jellabah. It smelled of camel. As I stumbled after him out one of the Sultan's private exits, it clutched at my feet and legs.

I got the hang of it—had to or lose al-Fassi swiftly gliding, like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an outsize wraith, through the twists and turns of the almost silent medina.

When the sun sets, most Fez-medina Arabs retreat indoors and close all shutters, making the tight slanting passageways as dark as mine shafts. Sliding and slithering over uneven cobblestones made slick with rain, I quickly lost all sense of where we were. Occasionally we passed shapes as anonymously shrouded as we and once I flattened against a building to let someone astride a tiny donkey squeeze by.

Haroun al-Fashad wouldn't have been as clumsy, but I felt a kinship with that other master of disguise. I began almost to hope for a glimpse (at a safe distance) of the 40 thieves prowling, scimitars at the ready.

Abruptly al-Fassi stopped before a massive carved door and told me he'd wait nearby. I felt around for a bell, gave up, and hammered with my fist. The great door groaned open. A hawk-nosed manservant in a red tarboush and a costume like a Shriner's looked me over warily. I shoved the hood back off my head. He nodded gravely and bowed me inside.

He helped me struggle out of the jellabah and hung it on an oak peg. A trace of sandalwood floated in the air; I hoped it masked the smell of camel.

He led me to a small interior courtyard roofed with glass, two stories up. Glowing copper and brass and hanging carpets and soft cushions were everywhere. The Shriner produced the mint tea of welcome, poured it from an antique silver pot, then glided away on red slippers with turned-up toes.

I'd taken one swallow when Madame appeared. No jellabah, no veil. Just a sheer something vaguely Moorish and some jeweled slave bracelets.

She sank to a cushion next to mine. "My house is your house, *cher ami*."

Naturally it had occurred to me that this *femme* might be *fatale*, that the whole Arabian charade was designed to relieve me of the formula without the formality of a cash payment. Well, it would take thumbscrews; I'd memorized it. "*Merci*, madame. But, you see, there are complications—"

"Of course, *mon cher* MacLean. I am a complicated woman. But all will become sweetly simple, enchantingly simple."

I followed that—more or less. Cash for goods delivered can add up to a sweet simple deal. But, enchanting? I tried again. "It's a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

question of substituting a natural for a synthetic."

"There will be nothing synthetic between you and me." To prove it, she pivoted with natural grace, easing her body across mine, and gently drew my head down. The sheer something slid from one shoulder.

"A–about the formula," I said huskily into the black cloud of her hair.

"You and I will have our own formula, *cheri.*" She tilted her head to look at me. "Ah, when you broke into my room, driven by tempestuous passion, I knew." Her laugh was silvery. "Your face that night—so stricken with desire, so foolish, so frightened at your own temerity. I knew then that we were destined to create a new formula, a formula of love, my foolish faun."

Great God. *Déja vu*? Was I in the wrong room with the wrong woman again? "I really have to see Louis," I ventured. "Details to work out."

"Who is this Louis? Can he matter? Not when you are you and I am I."

Well, hell, I went along with the gag. I kissed her. Wouldn't you?

Hammering at the street door jolted us apart. She sprang to her feet. "Quickly, *cheri.* You must flee."

"Flee? Where? How? Why?"

The hammering grew thunderous. The hawk-nosed Shriner glided in, looking questioningly at Madame. "Show monsieur another exit," she ordered, eyes blazing but voice controlled. To me, "Horrible men hired by my husband. He exposes me to ridicule by his public womanizing, yet because I am Moslem I am his property—go, *cheri,* fly. If these men seize you, I promise you will never emerge from the medina. Fly."

Swiftly the Shriner led the way, handing me my jellabah just before I ducked out through a low door somewhere in the rear of the house.

They had thought of that. Two of them. They charged.

Their eyes were accustomed to the dark, but all I could make out were two onrushing blurs. I flung the heavy jellabah at the blur on my right. It enveloped him, tangled his legs, sent him sprawling. I heard the clang of a knife on the cobblestones. The other blur lunged.

I spun away. His knife grazed my hip. Swinging back, I set myself, right-crossed him where I estimated his face was. Bulls-eye. I felt his nose splat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I heard the first one coming at me from behind. Diving for the ground, I rolled, frantically groping for the jellabah. Had he recovered his knife?

I never learned. Shouting joyfully, "I am here, O victorious warrior," al-Fassi hauled number two thug up from where I'd dropped him, slammed him into number one with such force that both toppled instantly and lay still.

"Hamad, you scrabbling desert scorpion," I said, once again minus my usual aplomb. "Was it your idea of a boffo gag to tip off the General's thugs? Never mind, I'm going to feed you in bite size to the medina rats. Slowly."

"Mac, Mac," he said reproachfully. "Where is your sense of humor? I did not dream you'd be attacked. Just frightened a little. Besides, you should not have been off with a woman when you and I had business to do."

We were in my room. I had cleaned up, patched the graze on my hip, and sent al-Fassi to fetch Hamad. He'd arrived smiling and impeccable from his shining shoes to his bravura boutonnière, a big red carnation. *Quelque chose de rouge.* Something red. Louis Bigard's chosen person.

He had the cash from Bigard. But I hadn't earned it yet. So, after a few more comments on the nasty end that inevitably awaited all impractical jokers, I sent him off to insist on a meeting with Bigard.

By the time we all got together at the machinery shed, Bigard was pacing irritably. When I told him he had to supply my chemist friend with rhodinal brewed from Le Domaine's geraniums, he refused flatly.

But my instructions on how to handle the clandestine shipments, plus my hard-nosed "No rhodinal, no formula," brought him reluctantly around.

I reeled off the formula. "Merde!" he said when I came to benzyl acetate, an artificial jasmine. "Impossible," he snapped at adipic acid, a synthetic fixative. "Natural jasmine and pure musk in such quantities will bankrupt me."

It wouldn't help much, but I offered to cut my fee because I hadn't had to pay my chemist. Sourly and without thanks, he accepted. Cash changed hands.

He'd stew a while. But he'd use the two synthetics. Today's CEO knows when to stick to time-honored natural ways and when to compromise.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The next day I said an affectionate goodbye to al-Fassi and unleashed the Lamborghini. As I drove, I pondered. And finally I realized why I'd thought Madame was Bigard's cutout rather than Hamad. *Erreur,* my *erreur.* The old masculine-feminine trap. In French there's little rhyme or reason why one noun and its pronouns are masculine and others feminine. But I'd always figured that with people, *il* was he, *elle* was she.

Not always so. For some strange Gallic reason the noun *personne,* person, is feminine. Thus its pronoun is *elle.* Even if the person in question is a man. Confusing? Well, any male-female thing can be confusing, *n'est-ce pas*?

Speaking of which, I'd learned through al-Fassi that Madame intended to punish her husband by basing herself at the Ritz in Paris for an extended jewelry-shopping spree. A sound female decision.

Soon Louis Bigard would make his decision, too. Parfums Bigard would start down the synthetics trail. While, unknowingly, Western Flavors & Fragrances of New York would be sullying its precious petrochemical derivatives with the real thing, a natural floral oil. Kind of comical.

In fact, my Arabian Nights in Fez had had moments resembling a Feydeau farce. With O'Spelin the Spy as chief goat.

I chuckled and let the car out a notch. Goat or not, I'd ferry from Tangier to Spain, cut on up to Zurich and chuckle all the way to my unnumbered Swiss bank account. And then Paris.

I've always enjoyed Paris. And its Hotel Ritz.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Connecticut 06835.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So how about applying that well-honed mind of yours to a solution?" . . .

A FISH STORY

by DOROTHY A. COLLINS

Retired Inspector Howard Travers leaned forward in his wheelchair and hungrily eyed the shopping bag his nephew carried over to him.

"What did you bring me?" he asked, like a small boy awaiting a treat.

Lieutenant John Gardiner smiled fondly at his uncle. "A feast," he said. "The latest issues of Queen and Hitchcock, a Macdonald, a Christie, an Ellin. A bottle of Chivas. And a puzzle that's been bugging me."

"Pour, pour," said Travers, rubbing his hands in anticipation. His arthritis-twisted fingers stroked the magazines and books his nephew set down beside him. "And let's hear your puzzle. A murder, I hope?"

John Gardiner laughed. "Ghoul," he said. He handed his uncle a glass of Scotch and sat down opposite him. "A murder, yes," he said. "The guilty party confessed, and it's all wrapped and tied neatly. Case closed. But the victim left a message–well, not a message, exactly, but a determined effort to identify his killer–and it doesn't make any sense. It could, in fact, implicate any one of three other people in the house at the time. But not, to my very great chagrin, the murderer himself. How does that grab you?"

"By the throat," said Howard Travers. "I'm hooked. Start at the beginning and don't leave anything out."

"Right," said his nephew. "The victim was Richard Cartwright, a man in his late seventies, bedridden with a heart condition and emphysema. Present in the house were his two stepdaughters, Angela, unmarried, and Molly Dennison, divorced. Both women were currently living with their stepfather. The third person in residence was Mary Pumplin, the housekeeper. The fourth and last individual in the house at the time was Marcus Draper, the confessed murderer,

© 1979 by Dorothy A. Collins.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cartwright's attorney and investment counsellor."

"Go on, go on," said Travers impatiently as Gardiner took a sip of his drink and settled back in his chair.

Gardiner grinned and continued his story: "Cartwright had summoned Draper to review his investments and discuss revising his will. The current will divided the bulk of his fortune between the two stepdaughters, with a hefty chunk going to Mrs. Pumplin, the housekeeper. However, the old man had been growing increasingly irascible and difficult in his relations with the three heirs, and there were tension and uncertainty in the household when the lawyer arrived on the afternoon of the murder.

"According to the housekeeper, she was just starting up the stairs when she heard the shot, then the sound of running feet. When she reached Cartwright's bedroom it was empty, except for Cartwright. Angela followed on the housekeeper's heels and they found Cartwright dying from a chest wound."

"Describe the room," said Travers, his eyes bright with interest.

"A large room, massive furniture, huge bed, Cartwright looking small and shrunken in its depths. Dim–heavy red velvet draperies shut out most of the light–the only illumination came from a single lamp at the bedside and a large lighted aquarium full of exotic fish opposite the bed.

"The message. Get to the message, boy."

"The two women rushed to the bed. 'Who did this, father?' cried Angela. The dying man struggled to speak, then raised a shaking hand, pointed to the fish tank, and fell back dead on the pillows. At which point Molly Dennison and Marcus Draper entered the room."

The Lieutenant paused. "How do you like it so far?" he said.

"Fine, as far as it goes. Keep going. What was in the tank?"

"Water, of course. Pump, filter, pebbles. And fish–Rainbows, Peacocks, Mollies, Loaches, Swords, Angels."

Travers smiled. "I see what you mean. The Mollies could point to Molly Dennison; the Angels to Angela; the pump to Mrs. Pumplin."

"Exactly. And an hour after we got there, Marcus Draper broke down and confessed. He'd been milking Cartwright for some time, and Cartwright caught him, threatened him with exposure and financial and professional ruin. He lost his head, grabbed Cartwright's gun from the bedside table, and shot him."

"So you're left with that apparently meaningless gesture of Cartwright's," said Travers. "Bothers you, doesn't it?"

"More than you can imagine," said the Lieutenant. "So how about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

applying that well-honed mind of yours to a solution?"

"No doubt in anyone's mind that it was the aquarium he pointed to?"

"None whatsoever. Both Molly and Mrs. Pumplin were agreed on that."

Travers thought a moment, then said abruptly, "Where was the tank?"

"Where I said–opposite the bed, in front of the east window."

Travers smiled. "But you didn't," he said. "Opposite the bed, yes. The window you didn't mention. And thereby hangs the solution."

"The window? What has the window got to do with anything?"

"Nothing," said his uncle. "Notice I said 'hangs.' Cartwright wasn't pointing at the fish tank–he was pointing at the window hangings–the *draperies,* my boy, those heavy red velvet draperies you described so fully."

"Of course," said Gardiner, grinning happily. "Draperies–Draper. Drink up, Uncle, you've earned yourself another."

IT IS HERE! A collection of twenty-one stories to guarantee you hours of entertainment.

EQ'S ANTHOLOGY

Vol. 39, Spring/Summer 1980 Edition

Please Mail to: Ellery Queen's Mystery Anthology 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017

☐ **Enclosed is $2.25 plus 65¢ shipping/handling (total $2.90) for the Spring/Summer '80 Vol. 39 Edition of Ellergy Queen's Anthology.**

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____ **Zip**_____

Q21180

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a NERO WOLFE short novel by

REX STOUT

complete in this issue

A switchboard operator in the office of an answering service—surely there is no safer job for a young woman. Well, no, not exactly . . . An unusual background for a detective story, and one of Nero Wolfe's most interesting short novels—believe it or not, Nero, a witness for the prosecution, investigates away *from home, and in the end outMasons Perry . . .*

THE NEXT WITNESS

by REX STOUT

I had had previous contacts with Assistant District Attorney Irving Mandelbaum, but had never seen him perform in a courtroom. That morning, watching him at the chore of trying to persuade a jury to clamp it on Leonard Ashe for the murder of Marie Willis, I thought he was pretty good and might be better when he had warmed up. A little plump and a little short, bald in front and big-eared, he wasn't impressive to look at, but he was businesslike and self-assured without being cocky, and he had a neat trick of pausing for a moment to look at the jury as if he half expected one of them to offer a helpful suggestion. When he pulled it, not too often, his back was turned to the judge and the defense counsel, so they couldn't see his face, but I could, from where I sat in the audience.

It was the third day of the trial, and he had called his fifth witness, a scared-looking little guy with a pushed-in nose who gave his name, Clyde Bagby, took the oath, sat down, and fixed his scared brown eyes on Mandelbaum as if he had abandoned hope.

Copyright 1955 by Rex Stout.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mandelbaum's tone was reassuring. "What is your business, Mr. Bagby?"

The witness swallowed. "I'm the president of Bagby Answers Ink."

"By 'Ink' you mean 'Incorporated'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you own the business?"

"I own half the stock that's been issued, and my wife owns the other half."

"How long have you been operating that business?"

"Five years now—nearly five and a half."

"And what is the business? Please tell the jury about it."

Bagby's eyes went left for a quick, nervous glance at the jury box but came right back to the prosecutor. "It's a telephone-answering business, that's all. You know what that is."

"Yes, but some members of the jury may not be familiar with the operation. Please describe it."

The witness licked his lips. "Well, you're a person or a firm or an organization and you have a phone, but you're not always there and you want to know about calls that come in your absence. So you go to a telephone-answering service. There are several dozen of them in New York, some of them spread all over town with neighborhood offices, big operations. My own operation, Bagby Answers Ink, it's not so big because I specialize in serving individuals, houses, and apartments, instead of firms or organizations. I've got offices in four different exchange districts—Gramercy, Plaza, Trafalgar, and Rhinelander. I can't work it from one central office because—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Bagby, but we won't go into technical problems. Is one of your offices at six-eighteen East Sixty-ninth Street, Manhattan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe the operation at that address."

"Well, that's my newest place, opened only a year ago, and my smallest, so it's not in an office building, it's an apartment—on account of the labor law. You can't have women working in an office building after two a.m. unless it's a public service, but I have to give my clients all-night service, so there on Sixty-ninth Street I've got four operators for the three switchboards, and they all live right there in the apartment. That way I can have one at the boards from eight till two at night, and another one from two o'clock on. After nine in the morning three are on, one for each board, for the daytime load."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are the switchboards installed in one of the rooms of the apartment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the jury what one of them is like and how it works."

Bagby darted another nervous glance at the jury box and went back to the prosecutor. "It's a good deal like any board in a big office, with rows of holes for the plugs. Of course it's installed by the telephone company, with the special wiring for connections with my clients' phones. Each board has room for sixty clients. For each client there's a little light and a hole and a card strip with the client's name. When someone dials a client's number his light goes on and a buzz synchronizes with the ringing of the client's phone. How many buzzes the girl counts before she plugs in depends on what client it is. Some of them want her to plug in after three buzzes, some want her to wait longer. I've got one client that has her count fifteen buzzes. That's the kind of specialized individualized service I give my clients. The big outfits, the ones with thousands of clients, they won't do that. They've commercialized it. With me every client is a special case and a sacred trust."

"Thank you, Mr. Bagby." Mandelbaum swiveled his head for a swift sympathetic smile at the jury and swiveled it back again. "But I wasn't buzzing for a plug for your business. When a client's light shows on the board, and the girl has heard the prescribed number of buzzes, she plugs in on the line, is that it?"

I thought Mandelbaum's crack was a little out of place for that setting, where a man was on trial for his life, and turned my head right for a glance at Nero Wolfe to see if he agreed, but one glimpse of his profile told me that he was sticking to his role of a morose martyr and so was in no humor to agree with anyone or anything.

That was to be expected. At that hour of the morning, following his hard-and-fast schedule, he would have been up in the plant rooms on the roof of his old brownstone house on West Thirty-fifth Street, bossing Theodore for the glory of his celebrated collection of orchids, even possibly getting his hands dirty. At eleven o'clock, after washing his hands, he would have taken the elevator down to his office on the ground floor, arranged his oversized corpus in his oversized chair behind his desk, rung for Fritz to bring beer, and started bossing Archie Goodwin, me. He would have given me any instructions he thought timely and desirable, for anything from typing a letter to tailing the mayor, which seemed likely to boost his income and add to his reputation as the best private detective

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

east of San Francisco. And he would have been looking forward to lunch by Fritz.

And all that was "would-have-been" because he had been subpoenaed by the State of New York to appear in court and testify at the trial of Leonard Ashe. He hated to leave his house at all, and particularly he hated to leave it for a trip to a witness box. Being a private detective, he had to concede that a summons to testify was an occupational hazard he must accept if he hoped to collect fees from clients, but this cloud didn't even have that silver lining. Leonard Ashe had come to the office one day about two months ago to hire him, but had been turned down. So neither fee nor glory was in prospect. As for me, I had been subpoenaed too, but only for insurance, since I wouldn't be called unless Mandelbaum decided Wolfe's testimony needed corroboration, which wasn't likely.

It was no pleasure to look at Wolfe's gloomy phiz, so I looked back at the performers. Bagby was answering. "Yes, sir, she plugs in and says, 'Mrs. Smith's residence,' or, 'Mr. Jones's apartment,' or whatever she has been told to say for that client. Then she says Mrs. Smith is out and is there any message, and so on, whatever the situation calls for. Sometimes the client has called and given her a message for some particular caller." Bagby flipped a hand. "Just anything. We give specialized service."

Mandelbaum nodded. "I think that gives us a clear picture of the operation. Now, Mr. Bagby, please look at that gentleman in the dark blue suit sitting next to the officer. He is the defendant in this trial. Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir. That's Mr. Leonard Ashe."

"When and where did you meet him?"

"In July he came to my office on Forty-seventh Street. First he phoned, and then he came."

"Can you give the day in July?"

"The twelfth. A Monday."

"What did he say?"

"He asked how my answering service worked, and I told him, and he said he wanted it for his home telephone at his apartment on East Seventy-third Street. He paid cash for a month in advance. He wanted twenty-four-hour service."

"Did he want any special service?"

"He didn't ask me for any, but two days later he contacted Marie Willis and offered her five hundred dollars if she—"

The witness was interrupted from two directions at once. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defense attorney, a champion named Jimmy Donovan whose batting average on big criminal cases had topped the list of the New York bar for ten years, left his chair with his mouth open to object; and Mandelbaum showed the witness a palm to stop him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Bagby. Just answer my questions. Did you accept Leonard Ashe as a client?"

"Sure, there was no reason not to."

"What was the number of his telephone at his home?"

"Rhinelander two-three-eight-three-eight."

"Did you give his name and that number a place on one of your switchboards?"

"Yes, sir, one of the three boards at the apartment on East Sixty-ninth Street. That's the Rhinelander district."

"What was the name of the employee who attended that board—the one with Leonard Ashe's number on it?"

"Marie Willis."

A shadow of stir and murmur rippled across the packed audience, and Judge Corbett on the bench turned his head to give it a frown and then went back to his knitting.

Bagby was going on. "Of course at night there's only one girl on the three boards—they rotate on that—but for daytime I keep a girl at her own board at least five days a week, and six if I can. That way she gets to know her clients."

"And Leonard Ashe's number was on Marie Willis's board?"

"Yes, sir."

"After the routine arrangements for serving Leonard Ashe as a client had been completed, did anything happen to bring him or his number to your personal attention?"

"Yes, sir."

"What and when? First, when?"

Bagby took a second to make sure he had it right before swearing to it. "It was Thursday, three days after Ashe had ordered the service. That was July fifteenth. Marie phoned me at my office and said she wanted to see me privately about something important. I asked if it could wait till she was off the board at six o'clock, and she said yes, and a little after six I went up to Sixty-ninth Street and we went into her room at the apartment. She told me Ashe had phoned her the day before and asked her to meet him somewhere to discuss some details about servicing his number. She told him such a discussion should be with me, but he insisted—"

A pleasant but firm baritone cut in. "If Your Honor pleases."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jimmy Donovan was on his feet. "I submit that the witness may not testify to what Marie Willis and Mr. Ashe said to each other when he was not present."

"Certainly not," Mandelbaum agreed shortly. "He is reporting what Marie Willis told him had been said."

Judge Corbett nodded. "That should be kept clear. You understand that, Mr. Bagby?"

"Yes, sir." Bagby bit his lip. "I mean Your Honor."

"Then go ahead. What Miss Willis said to you and you to her."

"Well, she said she had agreed to meet Ashe because he was a theatrical producer and she wanted to be an actress. I hadn't known she was stage-struck but I know it now. So she had gone to his office on Forty-fifth Street as soon as she was off the board, and after he talked some and asked some questions he told her—this is what she told me—he told her he wanted her to listen in on calls to his home number during the daytime. All she would have to do, when his light on her board went on and the buzzes started, if the buzzes stopped and the light went off—that would mean someone had answered the phone at his home—she would plug in and listen to the conversation. Then each evening she would phone him and report. That's what she said Ashe had asked her to do. She said he counted out five hundred dollars in bills and offered them to her and told her he'd give her another thousand if she went along."

Bagby stopped for wind. Mandelbaum prodded him. "Did she say anything else?"

"Yes, sir. She said she knew she should have turned him down flat, but she didn't want to make him sore, so she told him she wanted to think it over for a day or two. Then she said she had slept on it and decided what to do. She said of course she knew that what Ashe was after was phone calls to his wife, and aside from anything else she wouldn't spy on his wife, because his wife was Robina Keane, who had given up her career as an actress two years ago to marry Ashe, and Marie worshiped Robina Keane as her ideal.

"That's what Marie told me. She said she had decided she must do three things. She must tell me about it because Ashe was my client and she was working for me. She must tell Robina Keane about it, to warn her, because Ashe would probably get someone else to do the spying for him. It occurred to me that her real reason for wanting to tell Robina Keane might be that she hoped—"

Mandelbaum stopped him. "What occurred to you isn't material. Did Marie tell you the third thing she had decided she must do?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, sir. That she must tell Ashe that she was going to tell his wife. She said she had to because at the start of her talk with him she had promised Ashe she would keep it confidential, so she had to warn him she was withdrawing her promise."

"Did she say when she intended to do those three things?"

The witness nodded. "She had already done one of them, telling me. She said she had phoned Ashe and told him she would be at his office at seven o'clock. That was crowding it a little, because she had the evening shift that day and would have to be back at the boards at eight o'clock. It crowded me too because it gave me no time to talk her out of it. I went downtown with her in a taxi, to Forty-fifth Street, where Ashe's office was, and did my best but couldn't move her."

"What did you say to her?"

"I tried to get her to lay off. If she went through with her program it might not do any harm to my business, but again it might. I tried to persuade her to let me handle it by going to Ashe and telling him she had told me of his offer and I didn't want him for a client, and then drop it and forget it; but she was dead set on warning Robina Keane, and to do that she had to withdraw her promise to Ashe. I hung on until she entered the elevator to go up to Ashe's office, but I couldn't budge her."

"Did you go up with her?"

"No, that wouldn't have helped any. She was going through with it, and what could I do?"

So, I was thinking to myself, that's how it is. It looked pretty tough to me, and I glanced at Wolfe, but his eyes were closed, so I turned my head the other way to see how the gentleman in the dark blue suit seated next to the officer was taking it. Apparently it looked pretty tough to Leonard Ashe too. With deep creases slanting along the jowls of his dark bony face from the corners of his wide full mouth, and his sunken dark eyes, he was certainly a prime subject for the artists who sketch candidates for the hot seat for the tabloids, and for three days they had been making the most of it. He was no treat for the eyes, and I took mine away from him, to the left, where his wife sat in the front row of the audience.

I had never worshiped Robina Keane as my ideal, but I had liked her fine in a couple of shows, and she was giving a good performance for her first and only courtroom appearance—either being steadfastly loyal to her husband or putting on an act, but good in either case. She was dressed quietly and she sat quietly, but she wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to pretend she wasn't young and beautiful. Exactly how she and her older and unbeautiful husband stood with each other was anybody's guess, and everybody was guessing. One extreme said he was her whole world and he had been absolutely batty to suspect her of any hoop-rolling; the other extreme said she had quit the stage only to have more time for certain promiscuous activities, and Ashe had been a sap not to know it sooner; and anywhere in between. I wasn't ready to vote. Looking at her, she might have been an angel. Looking at him, it must have taken something drastic to get him that miserable, though I granted that being locked up two months on a charge of murder would have some effect.

Mandelbaum was making sure the jury had got it. "Then you didn't go up to Ashe's office with Marie Willis?"

"No, sir."

"Did you go up later, at any time, after she had gone up?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see Ashe at all that evening?"

"No, sir."

"Did you speak to him on the telephone that evening?"

"No, sir."

Looking at Bagby, and I have looked at a lot of specimens under fire, I decided that either he was telling it straight or he was an expert liar, and he didn't sound like an expert. Mandelbaum went on. "What did you do that evening, after you saw Marie Willis enter the elevator to go up to Ashe's office?"

"I went to keep a dinner date with a friend at a restaurant—Hornby's on Fifty-second Street—and after that around half-past eight, I went up to my Trafalgar office at Eighty-sixth Street and Broadway. I have six boards there, and a new night girl was on, and I stayed there with her a while and then took a taxi home, across the park to my apartment on East Seventieth Street. Not long after I got home a phone call came from the police to tell me Marie Willis had been found murdered in my Rhinelander office, and I went there as fast as I could go, and there was a crowd out in front, and an officer took me upstairs."

He stopped to swallow, and stuck his chin out a little. "They hadn't moved her. They had taken the plug cord from around her throat, but they hadn't moved her, and there she was, slumped over on the ledge in front of the board. They wanted me to identify her, and I had—"

The witness wasn't interrupted, but I was. There was a tug at my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sleeve, and a whisper in my ear—"We're leaving, come on." And Nero Wolfe arose, sidled past two pairs of knees to the aisle, and headed for the rear of the courtroom. For his bulk he could move quicker and smoother than you would expect, and as I followed him to the door and on out to the corridor we got no attention at all. I was assuming that some vital need had stirred him, like phoning Theodore to tell him or ask him something about an orchid, but he went on past the phone booths to the elevator and pushed the down button. With people all around I asked no questions. He got out at the main floor and made for Centre Street. Out on the sidewalk he backed up against the granite of the courthouse and spoke.

"We want a taxi, but first a word with you."

"No, sir," I said firmly. "First a word from me. Mandelbaum may finish with that witness any minute, and the cross-examination may not take long, or Donovan might even reserve it, and you were told you would follow Bagby. If you want a taxi, of course you're going home, and that will just—"

"I'm not going home. I can't."

"Right. If you do you'll merely get hauled back here and also a fat fine for contempt of court. Not to mention me. I'm under subpoena too. I'm going back to the courtroom. Where are you going?"

"To six-eighteen East Sixty-ninth Street."

I goggled at him. "I've always been afraid of this. Does it hurt?"

"Yes. I'll explain on the way."

"I'm going back to the courtroom."

"No. I'll need you."

Like everyone else, I love to feel needed, so I wheeled, crossed the sidewalk, flagged a taxi to the curb, and opened the door. Wolfe climbed in, and I followed. After he had got himself braced against the hazards of a carrier on wheels and I had given the driver the address, and we were rolling, I said, "Shoot. I've heard you do a lot of explaining, but this will have to be good."

"It's preposterous," he declared.

"It sure is. Let's go back."

"I mean Mr. Mandelbaum's thesis. I will concede that Mr. Ashe might have murdered that girl. I will concede that his state of mind about his wife might have approached mania, and therefore the motive suggested by that witness might have been adequate provocation. But he's not an imbecile. Under the circumstances as given, and I doubt if Mr. Bagby can be discredited, I refuse to believe he was ass enough to go to that place at that time and kill her. You

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were present when he called on me that day to hire me. Do you believe it?"

I shook my head. "I pass. You're explaining. However, I read the papers too, and also I've chatted with Lon Cohen of the *Gazette* about it. It doesn't have to be that Ashe went there for the purpose of killing her. His story is that a man phoned him—a voice he didn't recognize—and said if Ashe would meet him at the Bagby place on Sixty-ninth Street he thought they could talk Marie out of it, and Ashe went on the hop, and the door to the office was standing open, and he went in and there she was with a plug cord tight around her throat, and he opened a window and yelled for the police. Of course if you like it that Bagby was lying just now when he said it wasn't him that phoned Ashe, and that Bagby is such a good businessman that he would rather kill an employee than lose a customer—"

"Pfui. It isn't what I like, it's what I don't like. Another thing I didn't like was sitting there on that confounded wooden bench with a smelly woman against me. Soon I was going to be called as a witness, and my testimony would have been effective corroboration of Mr. Bagby's testimony, as you know. It was intolerable. I believe that if Mr. Ashe is convicted of murder on the thesis Mr. Mandelbaum is presenting it will be a justicial transgression, and I will not be a party to it. It wasn't easy to get up and go because I can't go home. If I go home they'll come and drag me out, and into that witness box."

I eyed him. "Let's see if I get you. You can't bear to help convict Ashe of murder because you doubt if he's guilty, so you're scooting. Right?"

The hackie twisted his head around to inform us through the side of his mouth, "Sure he's guilty."

We ignored it. "That's close enough," Wolfe said.

"Not close enough for me. If you expect me to scoot with you and invite a stiff fine for running out on a subpoena, which you will pay, don't try to guff me. Say we doubt if Ashe is guilty, but we think he may get tagged because we know Mandelbaum wouldn't go to trial without a good case. Say also our bank account needs a shot in the arm, which is true. So we decide to see if we can find something that will push Mandelbaum's nose in, thinking that if Ashe is properly grateful a measly little fine will be nothing. The way to proceed would be for you to think up a batch of errands for me, and you go on home and read a book and have a good lunch, but that's out because they'd come and get you. Therefore we must both do errands.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If that's how it stands, it's a fine day and I admit that woman was smelly, but I have a good nose and I think it was Tissot's Passion Flower, which is eighty bucks an ounce. What are we going to do at Sixty-ninth Street?"

"I don't know."

"Good. Neither do I."

It was a dump, an old five-story walkup, brick that had been painted yellow about the time I had started working for Nero Wolfe. In the vestibule I pushed the button that was labeled Bagby Answers, Inc., and when the click came I opened the door and led the way across the crummy little hall to the stairs and up one flight. Mr. Bagby wasn't wasting it on rent. At the front end of the hall a door stood open. As we approached it I stepped aside to let Wolfe go first, since I didn't know whether we were disguised as brush peddlers or as plumbers.

As Wolfe went to speak to a girl at a desk I sent my eyes on a quick survey. It was the scene of the murder. In the front wall of the room three windows overlooked the street. Against the opposite wall were ranged the three switchboards, with three females with headphones seated at them. They had turned their heads for a look at the company.

The girl at the desk, which was near the end window, had only an ordinary desk phone, in addition to a typewriter and other accessories. Wolfe was telling her, "My name is Wolfe and I've just come from the courtroom where Leonard Ashe is being tried." He indicated me with a jerk of his head. "This is my assistant, Mr. Goodwin. We're checking on subpoenas that have been served on witnesses, for both the prosecution and the defense. Have you been served?"

With his air and presence and tone, only one woman in a hundred would have called him, and she wasn't it. Her long narrow face tilted up to him, she shook her head. "No, I haven't."

"Your name, please?"

"Pearl Fleming."

"Then you weren't working here on July fifteenth."

"No, I was at another office. There was no office desk here then. One of the boards took office calls."

"I see." His tone implied that it was damned lucky for her that he saw. "Are Miss Hart and Miss Velardi and Miss Weltz here?"

My brows wanted to lift, but I kept them down, and anyway there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was nothing startling about it. True, it had been weeks since those names had appeared in the papers, but Wolfe never missed a word of an account of a murder, and his skull's filing system was even better than Saul Panzer's.

Pearl Fleming pointed to the switchboards. "That's Miss Hart at the end. Miss Velardi is next to her. Next to Miss Velardi is Miss Yerkes. She came after—she replaced Miss Willis. Miss Weltz isn't here; it's her day off. They've had subpoenas, but—"

She stopped and turned her head. The woman at the end board had removed her headphone, left her seat, and was marching over to us. She was about my age, with sharp brown eyes and flat cheeks and a chin she could have used for an icebreaker if she had been a walrus.

"Aren't you Nero Wolfe, the detective?" she demanded.

"Yes," he assented. "You are Alice Hart?"

She skipped it. "What do you want?"

Wolfe backed up a step. He doesn't like anyone so close to him, especially a woman. "I want information, madam. I want you and Bella Velardi and Helen Weltz to answer some questions."

"We have no information."

"Then I won't get any, but I'm going to try."

"Who sent you here?"

"Autokinesis. There's a a cardinal flaw in the assumption that Leonard Ashe killed Marie Willis, and I don't like flaws. It has made me curious, and when I'm curious there is only one cure—the whole truth, and I intend to find it. If I am in time to save Mr. Ashe's life, so much the better; but in any case I have started and will not be stopped. If you and the others refuse to oblige me today there will be other days—and other ways."

From her face it was a toss-up. Her chin stiffened, and for a second she was going to tell him to go soak his head; then her eyes left him for me, and she was going to take it. She turned to the girl at the desk. "Take my board, will you, Pearl? I won't be long." To Wolfe, snapping it: "We'll go to my room. This way." She whirled and started.

"One moment, Miss Hart." Wolfe moved. "A point not covered in the newspaper accounts." He stopped at the boards, behind Bella Velardi at the middle one. "Marie Willis' body was found slumped over on the ledge in front of the switchboard. Presumably she was seated at the switchboard when the murderer arrived. But you live here—you and the others?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes."

"Then if the murderer was Mr. Ashe, how did he know she was alone on the premises?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she told him she was. Is that the flaw?"

"Good heavens, no. It's conceivable that she did, and they talked, and he waited until a light and buzzes had her busy at the board, with her back to him. It's a minor point, but I prefer someone with surer knowledge that she was alone. Since she was small and slight, even you are not excluded"—he wiggled a finger—"or these others. Not that I am now prepared to charge you with murder."

"I hope not," she snorted, turning. She led the way to a door at the end of the room, on through, and down a narrow hall. As I followed, behind Wolfe, I was thinking that the reaction we were getting seemed a little exaggerated. It would have been natural, under the circumstances, for Miss Velardi and Miss Yerkes to turn in their seats for a good look at us, but they hadn't. They had sat, rigid, staring at their boards. As for Alice Hart, either there had been a pinch of relief in her voice when she asked Wolfe if that was the flaw, or I was in the wrong business.

Her room was a surprise. First, it was big, much bigger than the one in front with the switchboards. Second, I am not Bernard Berenson, but I have noticed things here and there, and the framed splash of red and yellow and blue above the mantel was not only a real Van Gogh, it was bigger and better than the one Lily Rowan had. I saw Wolfe spotting it as he lowered himself onto a chair actually big enough for him, and I pulled one around to make a group, facing the couch Miss Hart dropped onto.

As she sat she spoke. "What's the flaw?"

He shook his head. "I'm the inquisitor, Miss Hart, not you." He aimed a thumb at the Van Gogh. "Where did you get that picture?"

She looked at it, and back at him. "That's none of your business."

"It certainly isn't. But here is the situation. You have of course been questioned by the police and the District Attorney's office, but they were restrained by their assumption that Leonard Ashe was the culprit. Since I reject that assumption and must find another in its stead, there can be no limit to my impertinence with you and others who may be involved. Take you and that picture. If you refuse to say where you got it, or if your answer doesn't satisfy me, I'll put a man on it, a competent man, and he'll find out. You can't escape being badgered, madam; the question is whether you suffer it here and now, by me, or face a prolonged inquiry among your friends and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

associates by meddlesome men. If you prefer the latter don't waste time with me; I'll go and tackle one of the others."

She was tossing up again. From her look at him it seemed just as well that he had his bodyguard along. She tried stalling. "What does it matter where I got that picture?"

"Probably it doesn't. Possibly nothing about you matters. But the picture is a treasure, and this is an odd address for it. Do you own it?"

"Yes. I bought it."

"When?"

"About a year ago. From a dealer."

"The contents of this room are yours?"

"Yes. I like things that—well, this is my extravagance, my only one."

"How long have you been with this firm?"

"Five years."

"What is your salary?"

She was on a tight rein. "Eighty dollars a week."

"Not enough for your extravagance. An inheritance? Alimony? Other income?"

"I have never married. I had some savings, and I wanted—I wanted these things. If you save for fifteen years you have a right to something."

"You have indeed. Where were you the evening that Marie Willis was killed?"

"I was out in Jersey, in a car with a friend—Bella Velardi. To get cooled off—it was a hot night. We got back after midnight."

"In your car?"

"No, Helen Weltz had let us take hers. She has a Jaguar."

My brows went up, and I spoke. "A Jaguar," I told Wolfe, "is quite a machine. You couldn't squeeze into one. Counting taxes and extras, four thousand bucks isn't enough."

His eyes darted to me and back to her. "Of course the police have asked if you know of anyone who might have had a motive for killing Marie Willis. Do you?"

"No." Her rein wasn't so tight.

"Were you friendly with her?"

"Yes, friendly enough."

"Has any client ever asked you to listen in on calls to his number?"

"Certainly not!"

"Did you know Miss Willis wanted to be an actress?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, we all knew that."

"Mr. Bagby says he didn't."

Her chin had relaxed a little. "He was her employer. I don't suppose he knew. When did you talk with Mr. Bagby?"

"I didn't. I heard him on the witness stand. Did you know of Miss Willis' regard for Robina Keane?"

"Yes, we all knew that too. Marie did imitations of Robina Keane in her parts."

"When did she tell you of her decision to tell Robina Keane that her husband was going to monitor her telephone?"

Miss Hart frowned. "I didn't say she told me."

"Did she?"

"No."

"Did anyone?"

"Yes, Miss Velardi. Marie had told her. You can ask her."

"I shall. Do you know Guy Unger?"

"Yes, I know him. Not very well."

Wolfe was playing a game I had often watched him at, tossing balls at random to see how they bounced. It's a good way to try to find a lead if you haven't got one, but it may take all day, and he didn't have it. If one of the females in the front room took a notion to phone the cops or the D.A.'s office about us we might have visitors any minute. As for Guy Unger, that was another name from the newspaper accounts. He had been Marie Willis' boy friend, or had he? There had been a difference of opinion among the journalists. Miss Hart's opinion was that Guy Unger and Marie had enjoyed each other's company, but that was as far as it went—I mean her opinion. She knew nothing of any crisis that might have made Unger want to end the friendship with a plug cord. For another five minutes Wolfe went on with the game, tossing different balls from different angles, and then abruptly arose.

"Very well," he said. "For now. I'll try Miss Velardi."

"I'll send her in." Alice Hart was on her feet, eager to cooperate. "Her room is next door." She moved. "This way."

Obviously she didn't want to leave us with her Van Gogh. There was a lock on a bureau drawer that I could probably have manipulated in twenty seconds, and I would have liked to try my hand on it, but Wolfe was following her out, so I went along—to the right, down the hall to another door, standing open. Leaving us there, she strode on flat heels toward the front. Wolfe passed through the open door with me behind.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This room was different—somewhat smaller, with no Van Gogh and the kind of furniture you might expect. The bed hadn't been made, and Wolfe stood and scowled at it a moment, lowered himself gingerly onto a chair too small for him with worn upholstery, and told me curtly, "Look around."

I did so. Bella Velardi was a crack-lover. A closet door and a majority of the drawers in a dressing table and two chests were open to cracks of various widths. One of the reasons I am still shy a wife is the risk of getting a crack-lover. I went and pulled the closet door open, and, having no machete to hack my way into the jungle of duds, swung it back to its crack and stepped across to the library. It was a stack of paperbacks on a little table, the one on top being entitled *One Mistake Too Many*, with a picture of a double-breasted floozie shrinking in terror from a muscle-bound baboon. There was also a pile of recent editions of *Racing Form* and *Track Dope*.

"She's a philanthropist," I told Wolfe. "She donates dough to the cause of equine genetics."

"Meaning?"

"She bets on horse races."

"Does she lose much?"

"She loses. How much depends on what she bets. Probably tidy sums, since she takes two horse journals."

He grunted. "Open drawers. Have one open when she enters. I want to see how much impudence these creatures will tolerate."

I obeyed. The six drawers in the bigger chest all held clothes, and I did no pawing. A good job might have uncovered some giveaway under a pile of nylons, but there wasn't time for it. I closed all the drawers to show her what I thought of cracks. Those in the dressing table were also uninteresting. In the second drawer of the smaller chest, among other items, was a collection of photographs, mostly unmounted snaps, and, running through them, with no expectations, I stopped at one for a second look. It was Bella Velardi and another girl, with a man standing between them, in bathing outfits with the ocean for background. I went and handed it to Wolfe.

"The man?" I asked. "I read newspapers too, and look at the pictures, but it was two months ago, and I could be wrong."

He slanted it to get the best light from a window. He nodded. "Guy Unger." He slipped it into a pocket. "Find more of him."

"If any." I went back to the collection. "But you may not get a chance at her. It's been four minutes. Either she's getting a briefing from Miss Hart, or they've phoned for help, and in that case—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sound came of high heels clicking on the uncarpeted hall. I closed the second drawer and pulled the third one open, and was inspecting its contents when the clicks got to the door and were in the room. Shutting it in no hurry and turning to Bella Velardi, I was ready to meet a yelp of indignation, but didn't have to. With her snappy black eyes and sassy little face she must have been perfectly capable of indignation, but her nerves were too busy with something else. She decided to pretend she hadn't caught me with a drawer open, and that was screwy. Added to other things, it made it a cinch that these phone answerers had something on their minds.

Bella Velardi said in a scratchy little voice, "Miss Hart says you want to ask me something," and went and sat on the edge of the unmade bed, with her fingers twisted together.

Wolfe regarded her with his eyes half closed. "Do you know what a hypothetical question is, Miss Velardi?"

"Of course I do."

"I have one for you. If I put three expert investigators on the job of finding out approximately how much you have lost betting on horse races in the past year, how long do you think it would take them?"

"Why, I—" She blinked at him with a fine set of long lashes. "I don't know."

"I do. With luck, five hours. Without it, five days. It would be simpler for you to tell me. How much have you lost?"

She blinked again. "How do you know I've lost anything?"

"I don't. But Mr. Goodwin, who is himself an expert investigator, concluded from publications he found on that table that you are a chronic bettor. If so, there's a fair chance that you keep a record of your gains and losses." He turned to me. "Archie, your search was interrupted. Resume. See if you can find it." Back to her. "At his elbow if you like, Miss Velardi. There is no question of pilfering."

I went to the smaller chest. He was certainly crowding his luck. If she took this without calling a cop she might not be a murderess, but she sure had a tender spot she didn't want touched.

Actually she didn't just sit and take it. As I got a drawer handle to pull it open she loosened her tongue. "Look, Mr. Wolfe, I'm perfectly willing to tell you anything you want to know. Perfectly!" She was leaning toward him, her fingers still twisted. "Miss Hart said I mustn't be surprised at anything you asked, but I was, so I guess I was flustered. There's no secret about my liking to bet on the races, but the amounts I bet—that's different. You see, I have friends

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who—well, they don't want people to know they bet, so they give me money to bet for them. So it's about a hundred dollars a week, sometimes more, maybe up to two hundred."

If she liked to bet on any animals other than horses, one would have got her ten that she was a damn liar. Evidently Wolfe would have split it with me, since he didn't even bother to ask her the names of the friends.

He merely nodded. "What is your salary?"

"It's only sixty-five, so of course I can't bet much myself."

"Of course. About the windows in that front room. In summer weather, when one of you is on duty there at night, are they open?"

She was concentrating. "When it's hot, yes. Usually the one in the middle. If it's very hot, maybe all of them."

"With the shades up?"

"Yes."

"It was hot July fifteenth. Were the windows open that night?"

"I don't know. I wasn't here."

"Where were you?"

"I was out in Jersey, in a car with a friend—Alice Hart. To get cooled off. We got back after midnight."

Wonderful, I thought. That settled that. One woman might conceivably lie, but surely not two.

Wolfe was eyeing her. "If the windows were open and the shades up the evening of July fifteenth, as they almost certainly were, would anyone in her senses have proceeded to kill Marie Willis so exposed to view? What do you think?"

She didn't call him on the pronoun. "Why, no," she conceded. "That would have been—no, I don't think so."

"Then she—or he—must have closed the windows and drawn the shades before proceeding. How could Leonard Ashe, in the circumstances as given, have managed that without alarming Miss Willis?"

"I don't know. He might have—no, I don't know."

"He might have what?"

"Nothing. I don't know."

"How well do you know Guy Unger?"

"I know him fairly well."

She had been briefed all right. She was expecting that one.

"Have you seen much of him in the past two months?"

"No, very little."

Wolfe reached in his pocket and got the snapshot and held it out. "When was this taken?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She left the bed and was going to take it, but he held on to it. After a look she said, "Oh, that," and sat down again. All of a sudden she exploded, indignation finally breaking through. "You took that from my drawer! What else did you take?" She sprang up, trembling all over. "Get out of here! Get out and stay out!"

Wolfe returned the snap to his pocket, arose, and said, "Come Archie, there seems to be a limit after all," and started for the door.

He was at the sill when she darted past me, grabbed his arm, and took it back. "Wait a minute, I didn't mean that. I flare up like that. I just—I don't care about the damn picture."

Wolfe pulled loose and got a yard of space. "When was it taken?"

"About two weeks ago—two weeks ago Sunday."

"Who is the other woman?"

"Helen Weltz."

"Who took it?"

"A man that was with us."

"His name?"

"His name is Ralph Ingalls."

"Was Guy Unger Miss Weltz's companion, or yours?"

"Why, we—we were just together."

"Nonsense. Two men and two women are never just together. How were you paired?"

"Well—Guy and Helen, and Ralph and me."

Wolfe sent a glance at the chair he had vacated and apparently decided it wasn't worth the trouble of walking back to it. "Then since Miss Willis died Mr. Unger's interest has centered on Miss Weltz?"

"I don't know about 'centered.' They seem to like each other, as far as I know."

"How long have you been working here?"

"At this office, since it opened a year ago. Before that I was at the Trafalgar office for two years."

"When did Miss Willis tell you she was going to tell Robina Keane of her husband's proposal?"

She had expected that one too. "That morning. That Thursday, the fifteenth of July."

"Did you approve?"

"No, I didn't. I thought she ought to just tell him no and forget it. I told her she was asking for trouble and she might get it. But she was so daddled on Robina Keane—" Bella shrugged. "Do you want to sit down?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, thank you. Where is Miss Weltz?"

"This is her day off."

"I know. Where can I find her?"

She opened her mouth and closed it. She opened it again. "I'm not sure. Wait a minute," she said, and went clicking down the hall to the front. It was more like two minutes when she came clicking back and reported, "Miss Hart thinks she's at a little place she rented for the summer up in Westchester. Do you want me to phone and find out?"

"Yes, if you would."

Off she went, and we followed. In the front room the other three were at the boards. While Bella Velardi spoke to Miss Hart, and Miss Hart went to the phone at the desk and got a number and talked, Wolfe stood and frowned around, at the windows, the boards, the phone answerers, and me. When Miss Hart told him Helen Weltz was on the wire he went to the desk and took it.

"Miss Weltz? This is Nero Wolfe. As Miss Hart told you, I'm looking into certain matters connected with the murder of Marie Willis, and would like to see you. I have some other appointments but can adjust them. How long will it take you to get to the city? . . . You can't? . . . I'm afraid I can't wait until tomorrow . . . No, that's out of the question . . . I see. You'll be there all afternoon? . . . Very well, I'll do that."

He hung up and asked Miss Hart to tell me how to get to the place in Westchester. She obliged, and beyond Katonah it got so complicated that I got out my notebook. Also I jotted down the phone number. Wolfe had marched out with no amenities, so I thanked her politely and caught up with him halfway down the stairs. When we were out on the sidewalk I inquired, "A taxi to Katonah?"

"No." He was cold with rage. "To the garage for the car."

We headed west.

As we stood inside the garage, on Thirty-sixth Street near Tenth Avenue, waiting for Pete to bring the car down, Wolfe came out with something I had been expecting.

"We could walk home," he said, "in four minutes."

I gave him a grin. "Yes, sir. I knew it was coming—while you were on the phone. To go to Katonah we would have to drive. To drive we would have to get the car. To get the car we would have to come to the garage. The garage is so close to home that we might as well go and have lunch first. Once in the house, with the door

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bolted and not answering the phone, we could reconsider the matter of driving to Westchester. So you told her we would go to Katonah."

"No. It occurred to me in the cab."

"I can't prove it didn't. But I have a suggestion." I nodded at the door to the garage office. "There's a phone in there. Call Fritz first. Or shall I?"

"I suppose so," he muttered, and went to the office door and entered, sat at the desk, and dialed. In a moment he was telling Fritz who and where he was, asking some questions, and getting answers he didn't like. After instructing Fritz to tell callers that he hadn't heard from us and had no idea where we were, and telling him not to expect us home until we got there, he hung up, glared at the phone, and then glared at me.

"There have been four phone calls. One from an officer of the court, one from the District Attorney's office, and two from Inspector Cramer."

"Ouch." I made a face. "The court and the D.A., sure, but not Cramer. When you're within a mile of a homicide of his he itches from head to foot. You can imagine what kind of suspicions your walking out under a subpoena would give him. Let's go home. It will be interesting to see whether he has one dick posted out in front, or two or three. Of course he'll collar you and you may get no lunch at all, but what the hell."

"Shut up."

"Yes, sir. Here comes the car."

As we emerged from the office the brown sedan rolled to a stop before us and Pete got out and opened the rear door for Wolfe, who refuses to ride in front because when the crash comes the broken glass will carve him up. I climbed in behind the wheel, released the brake, fingered the lever, and fed gas.

At that time of day the West Side Highway wasn't too crowded, and north of Henry Hudson Bridge, and then on the Sawmill River Parkway, there was nothing to it. I could have let my mind roam if it had had anywhere to roam, but where? I was all for earning a little token of gratitude by jerking Leonard Ashe out from under, but how? It was so damn childish. In his own comfortable chair in his office, Wolfe could usually manage to keep his genius under control, but on the hard courtroom bench, with a perfumed woman crowded against him, knowing he couldn't get up and go home, he had dropped the reins, and now he was stuck.

He couldn't call it off and go back to court and apologize because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was too darned pigheaded. He couldn't go home. There was even a chance he couldn't go to Katonah for a wild goose. When I saw in the rear-view mirror a parkway police car closing in on us from behind, I tightened my lips, and when he passed on by and shot ahead I relaxed and took a deep breath. It would have been pretty extreme to broadcast a general alarm for a mere witness AWOL, but the way Cramer felt about Wolfe it wouldn't have been fantastic.

As I slowed down for Hawthorne Circle I told Wolfe it was a quarter to two and I was hungry and what about him, and was instructed to stop somewhere and get cheese and crackers and beer, and a little farther on I obeyed. Parked off a side road, he ate the crackers and drank the beer, but rejected the cheese after one taste. I was too hungry to taste.

The dash clock said 2:38 when, having followed Alice Hart's directions, I turned off a dirt road into a narrow rutted driveway, crawled between thick bushes on both sides, and reaching an open space, stepped on the brake to keep from rubbing a bright yellow Jaguar. To the left was a gravel walk across some grass that needed mowing, leading to a door in the side of a little white house with blue trim. As I climbed out two people appeared around the corner of the house. The one in front was the right age, the right size, and the right shape, with blue eyes and hair that matched the Jaguar, held back smooth with a yellow ribbon.

She came on. "You're Archie Goodwin? I'm Helen Weltz. Mr. Wolfe? It's a pleasure. This is Guy Unger. Come this way. We'll sit in the shade of the old apple tree."

In my dim memory of his picture in the paper two months back, and in the snap I had found in Bella Velardi's drawer, Guy Unger hadn't looked particularly like a murderer, and in the flesh he didn't fill the bill any better. He looked too mean, with mean little eyes in a big round face. His gray suit had been cut by someone who knew how, to fit his bulgy shoulders, one a little lower than the other. His mouth, if he had opened it wide, would have been just about big enough to poke his thumb in.

The apple tree was from colonial times, with windfalls of its produce scattered around. Wolfe glowered at the chairs with wooden slats which had been painted white the year before, but it was either that or squat, so he engineered himself into one. Helen Weltz asked what we would like to drink, naming four choices, and Wolfe said no, thank you, with cold courtesy. It didn't seem to faze her. She took a chair facing him, gave him a bright friendly smile, and in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cluded me with a glance from her lively blue eyes.

"You didn't give me a chance on the phone," she said, not complaining. "I didn't want you to have a trip for nothing. I can't tell you anything about that awful business, what happened to Marie. I really can't, because I don't know anything. I was out on the Sound on a boat. Didn't she tell you?"

Wolfe grunted. "That's not the kind of thing I'm after, Miss Weltz. Such routine matters as checking alibis have certainly been handled competently by the police, to the limit of their interest. My own interest has been engaged late—I hope not too late—and my attack must be eccentric. For instance, when did Mr. Unger get here?"

"Why, he just—"

"Now, wait a minute." Unger had picked up an unfinished highball from a table next to him and was holding it with the fingertips of both hands. His voice wasn't squeaky, as you would expect, but a thick baritone. "Just forget me. I'm looking on, that's all. I can't say I'm an impartial observer, because I'm partial to Miss Weltz, if that's all right with her."

Wolfe didn't even glance at him. "I'll explain, Miss Weltz, why I ask when Mr. Unger got here. I'll explain fully. When I went to that place on Sixty-ninth Street and spoke with Miss Hart and Miss Velardi I was insufferable, both in manner and in matter, and they should have flouted me and ordered me out, but they didn't. Manifestly they were afraid to, and I intend to learn why. I assume that you know why. I assume that, after I left, Miss Hart phoned you again, described the situation, and discussed with you how best to handle me. I surmise that she also phoned Mr. Unger, or you did, and he was enough concerned about me to hurry to get here before I arrived. Naturally I would consider that significant. It would reinforce my suspicion that—"

"Forget it," Unger cut in. "I heard about you being on your way about ten minutes ago, when I got here. Miss Weltz invited me yesterday to come out this afternoon. I took a train to Katonah, and a taxi."

Wolfe looked at him. "I can't challenge that, Mr. Unger, but it doesn't smother my surmise. On the contrary. I'll probably finish sooner with Miss Weltz if you'll withdraw. For twenty minutes, say?"

"I think I'd better stay."

"Then please don't prolong it with interruptions."

"You behave yourself, Guy," Helen scolded him. She smiled at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wolfe. "I'll tell you what I think, I think he just wants to show you how smart he is. When I told him Nero Wolfe was coming you should have heard him! He said maybe you're famous for brains and he isn't, but he'd like to hear you prove it, something like that. I don't pretend to have brains. I was just scared!"

"Scared of what, Miss Weltz?"

"Scared of you! Wouldn't anybody be scared if they knew you were coming to pump them?" She was appealing to him.

"Not enough to send for help." Wolfe wouldn't enter into the spirit of it. "Certainly not if they had the alternative of snubbing me, as you have. Why don't you choose it? Why do you suffer me?"

"Now *that's* a question." She laughed. "I'll show you why." She got up, took a step, and reached to pat him on the shoulder and then on top of the head. "I didn't want to miss a chance to touch the great Nero Wolfe!" She laughed again, moved to the table and poured herself a healthy dose of bourbon, returned to her chair, and swallowed a good half of it. She shook herself and said, "Brrrrr. That's why!"

Unger was frowning at her. It didn't need the brains of a Nero Wolfe, or even a Guy Unger, to see that her nerves were teetering on an edge as sharp as a knife blade.

"But," Wolfe said dryly, "having touched me, you still suffer me. Of course Miss Hart told you that I reject the thesis that Leonard Ashe killed Marie Willis and propose to discredit it. I'm too late to try any of the conventional lines of inquiry, and anyway they have all been fully and competently explored by the police and the District Attorney on one side and Mr. Ashe's lawyer on the other. Since I can't expect to prove Mr. Ashe's innocence, the best I can hope to establish is a reasonable doubt of his guilt. Can you give it to me?"

"Of course not. How could I?"

"One way would be to suggest someone else with motive and opportunity. Means is no problem, since the plug cord was there at hand. Can you?"

She giggled, and then was shocked, presumably at herself for giggling about murder. "Sorry," she apologized, "but you're funny. The way they had us down there at the District Attorney's office, and the way they kept after us, asking all about Marie and everybody she knew, and of course what they wanted was to find out if there was anybody besides that man Ashe that might have killed her. But now they're trying Ashe for it, and they wouldn't be trying him if they didn't think they could prove it, and here you come and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expect to drag it out of me in twenty minutes. Don't you think that's funny for a famous detective like you? I do."

She picked up her glass and drained it, stiffened to control a shudder, got up and started for the table. Guy Unger reached and beat her to the bottle. "You've had enough, Helen," he told her gruffly. "Take it easy." She stared down at him a moment, dropped the glass on his lap, and went back to her chair.

Wolfe eyed her. "No, Miss Weltz," he said. "No, I didn't expect to drag a disclosure from you in twenty minutes. The most I expected was support for my belief that you people have common knowledge of something that you don't want revealed, and you have given me that. Now I'll go to work, and I confess I'm not too sanguine. It's quite possible that after I've squandered my resources on it, time and thought and money and energy, and enlisted the help of half a dozen able investigators, I'll find that the matter you people are so nervous about has no bearing on the murder of Marie Willis and so is of no use to me, and of no concern. But I can't know that until I know what it is, so I'm going to know. If you think my process of finding out will cause inconvenience to you and the others, or worse, I suggest that you tell me now. It will—"

"I have nothing to tell you!"

"Nonsense. You're at the edge of hysteria."

"I am not!"

"Take it easy, Helen." Guy Unger focused his mean little eyes on Wolfe. "Look, I don't get this. As I understand it, what you're after is an out for Leonard Ashe on the murder. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And that's all?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me, did Ashe's lawyer hire you?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"Nobody. I developed a distaste for my function as a witness for the prosecution, along with a doubt of Mr. Ashe's guilt."

"Why doubt his guilt?"

Wolfe's shoulders went up a fraction of an inch, and down again. "Divination. Contrariety."

"I see." Unger pursed his midget mouth, which didn't need pursing. "You're shooting at it on spec." He leaned forward. "Understand me, I don't say that's not your privilege. Of course you have no standing at all, since you admit nobody hired you, but if Miss Weltz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tells you to go to hell that won't take you off her neck if you've decided to go to town. She'll answer anything you want to ask her that's connected with the murder, and so will I. We've told the police and the D.A., why not you? Do you regard me as a suspect?"

"Yes."

"Okay." He leaned back. "I first met Marie Willis about a year ago, a little more. I took her out a few times, maybe once a month, and then later a little oftener, to dinner and a show. We weren't engaged to be married, nothing like that. The last week in June, just two weeks before her death, she was on vacation, and four of us went for a cruise on my boat, up the Hudson and Lake Champlain. The other two were friends of mine, a man and a woman—do you want their names?"

"No."

"Well, that was what got me in the murder picture, that week's cruise she had taken on my boat so recently. There was nothing to it, we had just gone to have a good time, but when she was murdered the cops naturally thought I was a good prospect. There was absolutely nothing in my relations with Marie that could possibly have made me want to kill her. Any questions?"

"No."

"And if they had dug up a motive they would have been stuck with it, because I certainly didn't kill her the evening of July fifteenth. That was a Thursday, and at five o'clock that afternoon I was taking my boat through the Harlem River and into the Sound, and at ten o'clock that night I was asleep on her at an anchorage near New Haven. My friend Ralph Ingalls was with me, and his wife, and Miss Helen Weltz. Of course the police have checked it, but maybe you don't like the way they check alibis. You're welcome to check it yourself if you care to. Any questions?"

"One or two." Wolfe shifted his fanny on the board slats. "What is your occupation?"

"For God's sake. You haven't read the papers."

"Yes, I have, but that was weeks ago, and as I remember it they were vague. 'Broker,' I believe. Stockbroker?"

"No, I'm a freewheeler. I'll handle almost anything."

"Have you an office?"

"I don't need one."

"Have you handled any transactions for anyone connected with that business, Bagby Answers, Incorporated? Any kind of transaction?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unger cocked his head. "Now that's a funny question. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I suspect the answer is yes."

"Why? Just for curiosity."

"Now, Mr. Unger." Wolfe turned a palm up. "Since apparently you had heard of me, you may know that I dislike riding in cars, even when Mr. Goodwin is driving. Do you suppose I would have made this excursion completely at random? If you find the question embarrassing, don't answer it."

"It's not embarrassing." Unger turned to the table, poured an inch of bourbon in his glass, added two inches of water from a pitcher, gave it a couple of swirls, took a sip, and another one, finally put the glass down and turned back to Wolfe.

"I'll tell you," he said in a new tone. "This whole business is pretty damn silly. I think you've got hold of some crazy idea somewhere, God knows what, and I want to speak with you privately." He arose. "Let's take a little walk."

Wolfe shook his head. "I don't like conversing on my feet. If you want to say something without a witness, Miss Weltz and Mr. Goodwin can leave us. Archie?"

I stood up. Helen Weltz looked up at Unger, and at me, and then slowly lifted herself from her chair. "Let's go and pick flowers," I suggested. "Mr. Unger will want me in sight and out of hearing."

She moved. We picked our way through the windfalls of the apple tree, and of two more trees, and went on into a meadow where the grass and other stuff was up to our knees. She was in the lead. "Goldenrod I know," I told her back, "but what are the blue ones?"

No answer. In another hundred yards I tried again. "This is far enough unless he uses a megaphone."

She kept going. "Last call!" I told her. "I admit he would be a maniac to jump Mr. Wolfe under the circumstances, but maybe he is one. I learned long ago that with people involved in a murder case nothing is impossible."

She wheeled on me. "He's not involved in a murder case!"

"He will be before Mr. Wolfe gets through with him."

She plumped down in the grass, crossed her legs, buried her face in her hands, and started to shake. I stood and looked down at her, expecting the appropriate sound effect, but it didn't come. She just went on shaking, which wasn't wholesome. After half a minute of it I squatted in front of her, made contact by taking a firm grip on her bare ankle, and spoke with authority.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's no way to do it. Open a valve and let it out. Stretch out and kick and scream. If Unger thinks it's me and flies to the rescue that will give me an excuse to plug him."

She mumbled something. Her hands muffled it, but it sounded like "God help me." The shakes turned into shivers and were tapering off. When she spoke again it came through much better. "You're hurting me," she said, and I loosened my grip on her ankle and in a moment took my hand away, when her hands dropped and she lifted her head.

Her face was flushed, but her eyes were dry. "My God," she said, "it would be wonderful if you put your arms around me tight and told me, 'All right, my darling, I'll take care of everything, just leave it to me.' Oh, that would be wonderful!"

"I may try it," I offered, "if you'll brief me on what I'd have to take care of. The arms around you tight are no problem. Then what?"

She skipped over it. "God," she said bitterly, "am I a fool! You saw my car. My Jaguar."

"Yeah, I saw it. Very fine."

"I'm going to burn it. How do you set fire to a car?"

"Pour gasoline on it, all over inside, toss a match in, and jump back fast. Be careful what you tell the insurance company or you'll end up in the can."

She skipped again. "It wasn't only the car, it was other things too. I had to have them. Why didn't I get me a man? I could have had a dozen, but no, not me. I was going to do it all myself. It was going to be my Jaguar. And now here I am, and you, a man I never saw before—it would be heaven if you'd just take me over. I'm telling you, you'd be getting a bargain!"

"I might, at that." I was sympathetic. "Don't be too sure you're a bad guy. What are the liabilities?"

She twisted her neck to look across the meadow toward the house. Wolfe and Unger were in their chairs under the apple tree, evidently keeping their voices down, since no sound came, and my ears are good.

She turned back to me. "Is it a bluff? Is he just trying to scare something out of us?"

"No, not just. If he scares something out, fine. If not, he'll get it the hard way. If there's anything to get he'll get it. If you're sitting on a lid you don't want opened, my advice is to move, the sooner the better, or you may get hurt."

"I'm already hurt!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then hurt worse."

"I guess I can be." She reached for one of the blue flowers and pulled it off with no stem. "You asked what these are. They're wild asters, just the color of my eyes." She crushed it with her fingers and dropped it. "I already know what I'm going to do. I decided walking over here with you. What time is it?"

I looked at my wrist. "Quarter past three."

"Let's see, four hours—five. Where can I see Nero Wolfe around nine o'clock in town?"

From long habit I started to say at his office, but remembered it was out of bounds. "His address and number are in the phone book," I told her, "but he may not be there this evening. Phone and ask for Fritz. Tell him you are the Queen of Hearts, and he'll tell you where Mr. Wolfe is. If you don't say you're the Queen of Hearts he won't tell you anything because Mr. Wolfe hates to be disturbed when he's out. But why not save time and trouble? Evidently you've decided to tell him something, and there he is. Come on and tell him now."

She shook her head. "I can't. I don't dare."

"On account of Unger?"

"Yes."

"If he can ask to speak privately with Mr. Wolfe, why can't you?"

"I tell you I don't dare!"

"Well go and come back as soon as Unger leaves."

"He's not going to leave. He's going to ride to town with me."

"Then record it on tape and use me for tape. You can trust my memory. I guarantee to repeat it to Mr. Wolfe word for word. Then when you phone this evening he will have had time—"

"Helen! Helen!" Unger was calling her.

She started to scramble up, and I got upright and gave her a hand. As we headed across the meadow she spoke, barely above a whisper. "If you tell him I'll deny it. Are you going to tell him?"

"Wolfe, yes. Unger, no."

As we approached they left their chairs. Their expressions indicated that they had not signed a mutual nonaggression pact, but there were no scars of battle. Wolfe said, "We're through here, Archie," and was going.

Nobody else said anything, which made it rather stiff. Following Wolfe around the house to the open space, I saw that it would take a lot of maneuvering to turn around without scraping the Jaguar, so I had to back out through the bushes to the dirt road, where I swung the rear around to head the way we had come.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When we had gone half a mile I called back to my rear-seat passenger, "I have a little item for you!"

"Stop somewhere," he ordered, louder than necessary. "I can't talk like this."

A little farther on there was roadside room under a tree, and I pulled over and parked.

I twisted around in the seat to face him. "We got a nibble," I said, and reported on Helen Weltz. He started frowning, and when I finished he was frowning more.

"Confound it," he growled, "she was in a panic, and it'll wear off."

"It may," I conceded. "And so? I'll go back and do it over if you'll write me a script."

"Pfui. I don't say I could better it. You are a connoisseur of comely young women. Is she a murderess in a funk trying to wriggle out? Or what is she?"

I shook my head. "I pass. She's trying to wriggle all right, but for out of what I would need six guesses. What did Unger want privately? Is he trying to wriggle too?"

"Yes. He offered me money—five thousand dollars, and then ten thousand."

"For what?"

"Not clearly defined. A retaining fee for investigative services. He was crude about it for a man with brains."

"I'll be damned." I grinned at him. "I've often thought you ought to get around more. Only five hours ago you marched out of that courtroom in the interest of justice, and already you've scared up an offer of ten grand. Of course it may have nothing to do with the murder. What did you tell him?"

"That I resented and scorned his attempt to suborn me."

My brows went up. "He was in a panic, and it'll wear off. Why not string him along?"

"It would take time, and I haven't any. I told him I intend to appear in court tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" I stared. "With what, for God's sake?"

"At the least, with a diversion. If Miss Weltz's panic endures, possibly with something better, though I didn't know that when I was talking with Mr. Unger."

I looked it over. "Uh-huh," I said finally. "You've had a hard day, and soon it will be dark and dinnertime, and then bedtime, and deciding to go back to court tomorrow makes it possible for you to go home. Okay, I'll get you there by five o'clock."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I turned and reached for the ignition key, but had barely touched it when his voice stopped me. "We're not going home. Mr. Cramer will have a man posted there all night, probably with a warrant, and I'm not going to risk it. I had thought of a hotel, but that might be risky too, and now that Miss Weltz may want to see me it's out of the question. Isn't Saul's apartment conveniently located?"

"Yes, but he has only one bed. Lily Rowan has plenty of room in her penthouse, and we'd be welcome, especially you. You remember the time she squirted perfume on you."

"I do," he said coldly. "We'll manage somehow at Saul's. Besides, we have errands to do and may need him. We must of course phone him first. Go ahead. To the city."

He gripped the strap. I started the engine.

For more years than I have fingers Inspector Cramer of Homicide had been dreaming of locking Wolfe up, at least overnight, and that day he darned near made it. He probably would have if I hadn't spent an extra dime. Having phoned Saul Panzer, and also Fritz, from a booth in a drug store in Washington Heights, I called the *Gazette* office and got Lon Cohen. When he heard my voice he said, "Well, well. Are you calling from your cell?"

"No. If I told you where I am you'd be an accomplice. Has our absence been noticed?"

"Certainly, the town's in an uproar. A raging mob has torn the courthouse down. We're running a fairly good picture of Wolfe, but we need a new one of you. Could you drop in at the studio, say in five minutes?"

"Sure, glad to. But I'm calling to settle a bet. Is there a warrant for us?"

"You're damn right there is. Judge Corbett signed it first thing after lunch. Look, Archie, let me send a man—"

I told him much obliged and hung up. If I hadn't spent that dime and learned there was a warrant, we wouldn't have taken any special precaution as we approached Saul's address on East Thirty-eighth Street and would have run smack into Sergeant Purley Stebbins, and the question of where to spend the night would have been taken off our hands.

It was nearly eight o'clock. Wolfe and I had each disposed of three orders of chili con carne at a little dump on 170th Street where a guy named Dixie knows how to make it, and I had made at least a dozen phone calls trying to get hold of Jimmy Donovan, Leonard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ashe's attorney. That might not have been difficult if I could have left word that Nero Wolfe had something urgent for him, and given a number for him to call, but that wouldn't have been practical, since an attorney is a sworn officer of the law, and he knew there was a warrant out for Wolfe, not to mention me. So I hadn't got him, and as we crawled with the traffic through East Thirty-eighth Street the sight of Wolfe's scowl in the rear-view mirror didn't make the scene any gayer.

My program was to let him out at Saul's address between Lexington and Third, find a place to park the car, and join him at Saul's. But just as I swung over and was braking I saw a familiar broad-shouldered figure on the sidewalk, switched from the brake to the gas pedal, and kept going. Luckily a gap had opened, and the light was green at Third Avenue, so I rolled on through, found a place to stop without blocking traffic, and turned in the seat to tell Wolfe, "I came on by because I decided we don't want to see Saul."

"You did." He was grim. "What flummery is this?"

"No flummery. Sergeant Purley Stebbins was just turning in at the entrance. Thank God it's dark or he would have seen us. Now where?"

"At the entrance of Saul's address?"

"Yes."

A short silence. "You're enjoying this," he said bitterly.

"I am like hell. I'm a fugitive from justice, and I was going to spend the evening at the Polo Grounds watching a ball game. Where now?"

"Confound it. You told Saul about Miss Weltz."

"Yes, sir. I told Fritz that if the Queen of Hearts phones she is to call Saul's number, and I told Saul that you'd rather have an hour alone with her than a blue orchid. You know Saul."

Another silence. He broke it. "You have Mr. Donovan's home address."

"Right. East Seventy-seventh Street."

"How long will it take to drive there?"

"Ten minutes."

"Go ahead."

"Yes, sir. Sit back and relax." I fed gas.

It took only nine minutes at that time of evening, and I found space to park right in the block, between Madison and Park. As we walked to the number a cop gave us a second glance, but Wolfe's size and carriage rated that much notice without any special stim-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ulation. It was just my nerves. There were a canopy and a doorman, and rugs in the lobby. I told the doorman casually, "Donovan. We're expected," but he hung on.

"Yes, sir, but I have orders—Your name, please?"

"Judge Wolfe," Wolfe told him.

"One moment, please."

He disappeared through a door. It was more like five moments before he came back, looking questions but not asking them, and directed us to the elevator. Twelve B, he said.

Getting off at the twelfth floor, we didn't have to look for B because a door at the end of the foyer was standing open, and on the sill was Jimmy Donovan himself. In his shirt sleeves, with no necktie, he looked more like a janitor than a champion of the bar, and he sounded more like one when he blurted, "It's you, huh? What kind of trick is this? *Judge* Wolfe!"

"No trick." Wolfe was courteous but curt. "I merely evaded vulgar curiosity. I had to see you."

"You can't see me. It's highly improper. You're a witness for the prosecution. Also a warrant has been issued for you, and I'll have to report this."

He was absolutely right. The only thing for him to do was shut the door on us and go to his phone and call the D.A.'s office. My one guess why he didn't, which was all I needed, was that he would have given his shirt, and thrown in a necktie, to know what Wolfe was up to. He didn't shut the door.

"I'm not here," Wolfe said, "as a witness for the prosecution. I don't intend to discuss my testimony with you. As you know, your client, Leonard Ashe, came to me one day in July and wanted to hire me, and I refused. I have become aware of certain facts connected with what he told me that day which I think he should know about, and I want to tell him. I suppose it would be improper for me to tell you more than that, but it wouldn't be improper to tell him. He is on trial for first-degree murder."

I had the feeling I could see Donovan's brain working at it behind his eyes. "It's preposterous. You know damn well you can't see him."

"I can if you'll arrange it. That's what I'm here for. You're his counsel. Early tomorrow morning will do, before the court sits. You may of course be present if you wish, but I suppose you would prefer not to. Twenty minutes with him will be enough."

Donovan was chewing his lip. "I can't ask you what you want to tell him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I understand that. I won't be on the witness stand, where you can cross-examine me, until tomorrow."

"No." The lawyer's eyes narrowed. "No, you won't. I can't arrange for you to see him; it's out of the question. I shouldn't be talking to you. It will be my duty to report this to Judge Corbett in the morning. Good evening, gentlemen."

He backed up and swung the door shut, but didn't bang it, which was gracious of him. We rang for the elevator, were taken down, and went out and back to the car.

"You'll phone Saul," Wolfe said.

"Yes, sir. His saying he'll report to the judge in the morning meant he didn't intend to phone the D.A. now, but he might change his mind. I'd rather move a few blocks before phoning."

"Very well. Do you know the address of Mrs. Leonard Ashe's apartment?"

"Yes, Seventy-third Street."

"Go in that direction. I have to see her, and you'd better phone and arrange it."

"You mean now."

"Yes."

"That should be a cinch. She's probably sitting there hoping a couple of strange detectives will drop in. Do I have to be Judge Goodwin?"

"No. We are ourselves."

As I drove downtown on Park, and east on Seventy-fourth to Third Avenue, and down a block, and west on Seventy-third, I considered the approach to Robina Keane. By not specifying it Wolfe had left it to me, so it was my problem. I thought of a couple of fancy strategies, but by the time I got the car maneuvered to the curb in the only vacant spot between Lexington and Madison I had decided that the simplest was the best. After asking Wolfe if he had any suggestions and getting a no, I walked to Lexington and found a booth in a drug store.

First I called Saul Panzer. There had been no word from the Queen of Hearts, but she had said around nine o'clock and it was only eight forty. Sergeant Stebbins had been and gone. What he had said was that the police were concerned about the disappearance of Nero Wolfe because he was an important witness in a murder case, and they were afraid something might have happened to him, especially since Archie Goodwin was also gone. What he had not said was that Inspector Cramer suspected that Wolfe had tramped out of the court-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room hell-bent on messing the case up, and he wanted to get his hands on him quick. Had Wolfe communicated with Saul, and did Saul know where he was? There was a warrant out for both Wolfe and Goodwin. Saul had said no, naturally, and Purley had made some cutting remarks and left.

I dialed another number, and when a female voice answered I told it I would like to speak to Mrs. Ashe. It said Mrs. Ashe was resting and couldn't come to the phone. I said I was speaking for Nero Wolfe and it was urgent and vital. It said Mrs. Ashe absolutely would not come to the phone. I asked it if it had ever heard of Nero Wolfe, and it said of course. All right, I said, tell Mrs. Ashe that he must see her immediately and he can be there in five minutes. That's all I can tell you on the phone, I said, except that if she doesn't see him she'll never stop regretting it.

The voice told me to hold the wire, and was gone so long I began to wish I had tried a fancy one, but just as I was reaching for the handle of the booth door to let in some air it came back and said Mrs. Ashe would see Mr. Wolfe. I asked it to instruct the lobby guardians to admit us, hung up, went out and back to the car, and told Wolfe, "Okay. You'd better make it good after what I told her. No word from Helen Weltz. Stebbins only asked some foolish questions and got the answers he deserved."

He climbed out, and we walked to the number. This one was smaller and more elegant, too elegant for rugs. The doorman was practically Laurence Olivier, and the elevator man was his older brother. They were chilly but nothing personal. When we were let out at the sixth floor the elevator man stayed at his open door until we had pushed a button and the apartment door had opened and we had been told to enter.

The woman admitting us wasn't practically Phyllis Jay, she was Phyllis Jay. Having paid $4.40 or $5.50 several times to see her from an orchestra seat, I would have appreciated this free close-up of her on a better occasion, but my mind was occupied. So was hers. Of course she was acting, since actresses always are, but the glamor was turned off because the part didn't call for it. She was playing a support for a friend in need, and kept strictly in character as she relieved Wolfe of his hat and cane and then escorted us into a big living room, across it, and through an arch into a smaller room.

Robina Keane was sitting on a couch, patting at her hair. Wolfe stopped three paces off and bowed. She looked up at him, shook her head as if to dislodge a fly, pressed her fingertips to her eyes, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked at him again. Phyllis Jay said, "I'll be in the study, Robbie," waited precisely the right interval for a request to stay, didn't get it, turned, and went. Mrs. Ashe invited us to sit, and, after moving a chair around for Wolfe, I took one off at the side.

"I'm dead-tired," she said. "I'm so empty, completely empty. I don't think I ever—But what is it? Of course, it's about my husband?"

Either the celebrated lilt of her voice was born in, or she had used it so much and so long that it might as well have been. She looked all in, no doubt of that, but the lilt was there.

"I'll make it as brief as I can," Wolfe told her. "Do you know that I have met your husband? That he called on me one day in July?"

"Yes, I know. I know all about it—now."

"It was to testify about our conversation that day that I was summoned to appear at his trial, by the State. In court this morning, waiting to be called, an idea came to me which I thought merited exploration, and if it was to bring any advantage to your husband the exploration could not wait. So I walked out, with Mr. Goodwin, my assistant, and we have spent the day on that idea."

"What idea?" Her hands were fists, on the couch for props.

"Later for that. We have made some progress, and we may make more tonight. Whether we do or not, I have information that will be of considerable value to your husband. It may not exculpate him, but at least it should raise sufficient doubt in the minds of the jury to get him acquitted. The problem is to get information to the jury. It would take intricate and prolonged investigation to get it in the form of admissible evidence, and I have in mind a short cut. To take it I must have a talk with your husband."

"But he—How can you?"

"I must. I have just called on Mr. Donovan, his attorney, and asked him to arrange it, but I knew he wouldn't; that was merely to anticipate you. I knew that if I came to you, you would insist on consulting Mr. Donovan and I have already demonstrated the futility of that. I am in contempt of the court, and a warrant has been issued for my arrest. Also I am under subpoena as a witness for the prosecution, and it is improper for the defense counsel even to talk with me, let alone arrange an interview for me with his client.

"But you, as the wife of a man on trial for his life, are under no such prescription. You have wide acquaintance and great personal charm. It would not be too difficult, certainly not impossible, for you to get permission to talk with your husband tomorrow morning before the court convenes; and you can take me with you. Twenty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minutes would be ample, and even ten would do. Don't mention me in getting the permission; that's important; simply take me with you and we'll see. If it doesn't work there's another possible expedient. Will you do it?"

She was frowning. "I don't see—You just want to talk with him?"

"Yes."

"What do you want to tell him?"

"You'll hear it tomorrow morning when he does. It's complicated and conjectural. To tell you now might compromise my plan to get it to the jury, and I won't risk it."

"But tell me what it's about. Is it about me?"

Wolfe lifted his shoulders to take in a deep breath, and let them sag again. "You say you're dead-tired, madam. So am I. I would be interested in you only if I thought you were implicated in the murder of Marie Willis, and I don't. At considerable risk to my reputation, my self-esteem, and possibly even my bodily freedom, I am undertaking a step which should be useful to your husband and am asking your help; but I am not asking you to risk anything. You have nothing to lose, but I have. Of course I have made an assumption that may not be valid: that, whether you are sincerely devoted to your husband or not, you don't want him convicted of murder. I can't guarantee that I have the key that will free him, but I'm not a novice in these matters."

Her jaw was working. "You didn't have to say that." The lilt was gone. "Whether I'm devoted to my husband. My husband's not a fool, but he acted like one. I love him very dearly, and I want—" Her jaw worked. "I love him very much. No, I don't want him convicted of murder. You're right, I have nothing to lose, nothing more to lose. But if I do this I'll have to tell Mr. Donovan."

"No. You must not. Not only would he forbid it, he would prevent it. This is for you alone."

She abandoned the prop of her fists and straightened her back. "I thought I was too tired to live," she said, lilting again, "and I am, but it's going to be a relief to do something." She left the couch and was on her feet. "I'm going to do it. As you say, I have a wide acquaintance, and I'll do it all right. You go on and make some more progress and leave this to me. Where can I reach you?"

Wolfe turned. "Saul's number, Archie."

I wrote it on a leaf of my notebook and went and handed it to her. Wolfe arose. "I'll be there all night, Mrs. Ashe, up to nine in the morning, but I hope it will be before that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I doubted if she heard him. Her mind was so glad to have a job that it had left us entirely. She did go with us to the foyer to see us out, but she wasn't there. I was barely across the threshold when she shut the door.

We went back to the car and headed downtown on Park Avenue. It seemed unlikely that Purley Stebbins had taken it into his head to pay Saul a second call, but a couple of blocks away I stopped to phone, and Saul said he was alone. It seemed even more unlikely that Stebbins had posted a man out front, but I stopped twenty yards short of the number and took a good long look. There was a curb space a little farther down, and I squeezed the car into it and looked some more before opening the door for Wolfe to climb out. We crossed the street and entered the vestibule, and I pushed the button.

When we left the self-service elevator at the fifth floor Saul was there to greet us. I suppose to some people Saul Panzer is just a little guy with a big nose who always seems to need a shave, but to others, including Wolfe and me, he's the best free-for-all operative that ever tailed a subject. Wolfe had never been at his place before, but I had, many times over the years, mostly on Saturday nights with three or four others for some friendly and ferocious poker. Inside Wolfe stood and looked around. It was a big room, lighted with two floor lamps and two table lamps. One wall had windows, another was solid with books, and the other two had pictures and shelves that were cluttered with everything from chunks of minerals to walrus tusks. In the far corner was a grand piano.

"A good room," Wolfe said. "Satisfactory. I congratulate you." He crossed to a chair, the nearest thing to his idea of a chair he had seen all day, and sat. "What time is it?"

"Twenty minutes to ten."

"Have you heard from that woman?"

"No, sir. Will you have some beer?"

"I will indeed. If you please."

In the next three hours he accounted for seven bottles. He also handled his share of liver pâté, herring, sturgeon, pickled mushroom, Tunisian melon, and three kinds of cheese. Saul was certainly prancing as a host, though he is not a prancer. Naturally, the first time Wolfe ate under his roof, and possibly the last, he wanted to give him good grub, that was okay, but I thought the three kinds of cheese was piling it on a little. He sure would be sick of cheese by Saturday. He wasn't equipped to be so fancy about sleeping. Since he was the host it was his problem, and his arrangement was Wolfe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the bedroom, me on the couch in the big room, and him on the floor, which seemed reasonable.

However, at a quarter to one in the morning we were still up. Though time hadn't dragged too heavily, what with talking and eating and drinking and three hot games of checkers between Wolfe and Saul, all draws, we were all yawning. We hadn't turned in because we hadn't heard from Helen Weltz, and there was still a dim hope. The other thing was all set. Just after midnight Robina Keane had phoned and told Wolfe she had it fixed. He was to meet her in Room 917 at 100 Centre Street at half-past eight. He asked me if I knew what Room 917 was, and I didn't. After that came he leaned back and sat with his eyes closed for a while, then straightened up and told Saul he was ready for the fourth game of checkers.

At a quarter to one he left his chair, yawned and stretched, and announced, "Her panic wore off. I am going to bed."

"I'm afraid," Saul apologized, "I have no pajamas you could get into, but I've got—"

The phone rang. I was nearest, and turned and got it. "This is Jackson four-three-one-oh-nine."

"I want—This is the Queen of Hearts."

"It sure is. I recognize your voice. This is Archie Goodwin. Where are you?"

"In a booth at Grand Central. I couldn't get rid of him, and the—but that doesn't matter now. Where are you?"

"In an apartment on Thirty-eighth Street with Mr. Wolfe, waiting for you. It's a short walk. I'll meet you at the information booth, upper level, in five minutes. Will you be there?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Of course I will!"

I hung up, turned, and said loftily, "If it wore off it wore on again. Make some coffee, will you, Saul? She'll need either that or bourbon. And maybe she likes cheese."

I departed.

At six minutes past ten in the morning Assistant District Attorney Mandelbaum was standing at the end of his table in the courtroom to address Judge Corbett. The room was packed. The jury was in the box. Jimmy Donovan, defense attorney, looking not at all like a janitor, was fingering through some papers his assistant had handed him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your Honor," Mandelbaum said, "I wish to call a witness whom I called yesterday, but he was not available. I learned only a few minutes ago that he is present. You will remember that on my application you issued a warrant for Mr. Nero Wolfe."

"Yes, I do." The judge cleared his throat. "Is he here?"

"He is." Mandelbaum turned and called, "Nero Wolfe!"

Having arrived at one minute to ten, we wouldn't have been able to get in if we hadn't pushed through to the officer at the door and told him who we were and that we were wanted. He had stared at Wolfe and admitted he recognized him, and let us in, and the attendant had managed to make room for us on a bench just as Judge Corbett entered. When Wolfe was called by Mandelbaum and got up to go forward I had enough space.

He walked down the aisle, through the gate, mounted the stand, turned to face the judge, and stood.

"I have some questions for you, Mr. Wolfe," the judge said, "after you are sworn."

The attendant extended the Book and administered the oath, and Wolfe sat. A witness chair is supposed to take any size, but that one just barely made it.

The judge spoke. "You knew you were to be called yesterday. You were present, but you left and could not be found, and a warrant was issued for you. Are you represented by counsel?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you leave? You are under oath."

"I was impelled to leave by a motive which I thought imperative. I will of course expound it now if you so order, but I respectfully ask your indulgence. I understand that if my reason for leaving is unsatisfactory I will be in contempt of court and will suffer a penalty. But I ask, Your Honor, does it matter whether I am adjudged in contempt now, or later, after I have testified? Because my reason for leaving is inherent in my testimony, and therefore I would rather plead on the charge of contempt afterwards, if the court will permit. I'll still be here."

"Indeed you will. You're under arrest."

"No, I'm not."

"You're not under arrest?"

"No, sir. I came here voluntarily."

"Well, you are now." The judge turned his head. "Officer, this man is under arrest." He turned back. "Very well. You will answer to the contempt charge later. Proceed, Mr. Mandelbaum."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mandelbaum approached the chair. "Please tell the jury your name, occupation, and address."

Wolfe turned to the jury box. "I am Nero Wolfe, a licensed private detective, with my office in my house at nine-eighteen West Thirty-fifth Street, Manhattan, New York City."

"Have you ever met the defendant in this case?" Mandelbaum pointed. "That gentleman."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Leonard Ashe."

"Where and under what circumstances did you meet him?"

"He called on me at my office, by appointment, at eleven o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, July thirteenth, this year."

"What did he say to you on that occasion?"

"That he wished to engage my professional services. That he had, the preceding day, arranged for an answering service for the telephone at his residence on Seventy-third Street in New York. That he had learned, upon inquiry, that one of the employees of the answering service would be assigned to his number and would serve it five or six days a week. That he wanted to hire me to learn the identity of that employee, and to propose to her that she eavesdrop on calls made during the daytime to his number, and report on them either to him or to me—I can't say definitely which, because he wasn't clear on that point."

"Did he say why he wanted to make that arrangement?"

"No. He didn't get that far."

Donovan was up. "Objection, Your Honor. Conclusion of the witness as to the intention of the defendant."

"Strike it," Mandelbaum said amiably. "Strike all of his answer except the word 'No.' Your answer is 'No,' Mr. Wolfe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the defendant suggest any inducement to be offered to the employee to get her to do the eavesdropping?"

"He didn't name a sum, but he indicated that—"

"Not what he indicated. What he said."

I allowed myself a grin. Wolfe, who always insisted on precision, who loved to ride others, especially me, for loose talk, and who certainly knew the rules of evidence, had been caught twice. I promised myself to find occasion later to comment on it.

He was unruffled. "He said that he would make it worth her while, meaning the employee, but stated no amount."

"What else did he say?"

"That was all. The entire conversation was only a few minutes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As soon as I understood clearly what he wanted to hire me to do, I refused to do it."

"Did you tell him why you refused?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you say?"

"I said that while it is the function of a detective to pry into people's affairs, I excluded from my field anything connected with marital difficulties and therefore declined his job."

"Had he told you that what he wanted was to spy on his wife?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you mention marital difficulties to him?"

"Because I had concluded that that was the nature of his concern."

"What else did you say to him?"

Wolfe shifted in the chair. "I would like to be sure I understand the question. Do you mean that day, or on a later occasion?"

"I mean that day. There was no later occasion, was there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you saying that you had another meeting with the defendant, on another day?"

"Yes, sir."

Mandelbaum held a pose. Since his back was to me I couldn't see his look of surprise, but I didn't have to. In his file was Wolfe's signed statement saying among other things that he had not seen Leonard Ashe before or since July 13. His voice went up a notch. "When and where did this meeting take place?"

"Shortly after nine o'clock this morning, in this building."

"You met and spoke with the defendant in this building today?"

"Yes, sir."

"Under what circumstances?"

"His wife had arranged to see and speak with him, and she allowed me to accompany her."

"How did she arrange it? With whom?"

"I don't know."

"Was Mr. Donovan, the defense counsel, present?"

"No, sir."

"Who was?"

"Mrs. Ashe, Mr. Ashe, myself, and two armed guards, one at the door and one at the end of the room."

"What room was it?"

"I don't know. There was no number on the door. I think I could lead you to it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mandelbaum whirled around and looked at Robina Keane, seated on the front bench. Not being a lawyer, I didn't know whether he could get her to the stand or not. Of course a wife couldn't be summoned to testify against her husband, but I didn't know if this would have come under that ban. Anyway, he either skipped it or postponed it. He asked the judge to allow him a moment and went to the table to speak in an undertone to a colleague.

I looked around. I had already spotted Guy Unger, in the middle of the audience on the left. Bella Velardi and Alice Hart were on the other side, next to the aisle. Apparently the Sixty-ninth Street office of Bagby Answers, Inc., was being womaned for the day from other offices. Clyde Bagby, the boss, was a couple of rows in front of Unger. Helen Weltz, the Queen of Hearts, whom I had driven from Saul's address to a hotel seven hours ago, was in the back, not far from me.

The colleague got up and left, in a hurry, and Mandelbaum went back to Wolfe.

"Don't you know," he demanded, "that it is a misdemeanor for a witness for the State to talk with the defendant charged with a felony?"

"No, sir, I don't. I understand it would depend on what was said. I didn't discuss my testimony with Mr. Ashe."

"What did you discuss?"

"Certain matters which I thought would be of interest to him."

"What matters? Exactly what did you say?"

I took a deep breath, spread and stretched my fingers, and relaxed. The fat son-of-a-gun had put it over. Having asked that question, Mandelbaum couldn't possibly keep it from the jury unless Jimmy Donovan was a sap, and he wasn't.

Wolfe testified: "I said that yesterday, seated in this room awaiting your convenience, I had formed a surmise that certain questions raised by the murder of Marie Willis had not been sufficiently considered and investigated, and that therefore my role as a witness for the prosecution was an uncomfortable one. I said that I had determined to satisfy myself on certain points; that I knew that in leaving the courtroom I would become liable to a penalty for contempt of court, but that the integrity of justice was more important than my personal ease; that I had been confident that Judge Corbett would—"

"If you please, Mr. Wolfe. You are not now pleading to a charge of contempt."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, sir. You asked what I said to Mr. Ashe. He asked what surmise I had formed, and I told him—that it was a double surmise. First, that as one with long experience in the investigation of crime and culprits, I had an appreciable doubt of his guilt. Second, that the police had been so taken by the circumstances pointing to Mr. Ashe—his obvious motive and his discovery of the body—that their attention in other directions had possibly been somewhat dulled. For example, an experienced investigator always has a special eye and ear for any person occupying a privileged position. Such persons are doctors, lawyers, trusted servants, intimate friends, and, of course, close relatives. If one in those categories is a rogue he has peculiar opportunities for his scoundrelism. It occurred to me that—"

"You said all this to Mr. Ashe?"

"Yes, sir. It occurred to me that a telephone-answering service was in the same kind of category as those I have mentioned, as I sat in this room yesterday and heard Mr. Bagby describe the operation of the switchboards. An unscrupulous operator might, by listening in on conversations, obtain various kinds of information that could be turned to account—for instance, about the stock market, about business or professional plans, about a multitude of things. The possibilities would be limitless. Certainly one, and perhaps the most promising, would be the discovery of personal secrets. Most people are wary about discussing or disclosing vital secrets on the telephone, but many are not, and in emergencies caution is often forgotten. It struck me that for getting the kind of information, or at least hints of it, that is most useful and profitable for a blackmailer, a telephone-answering service has potentialities equal to those of a doctor or lawyer or trusted servant. Any operator at the switchboard could simply—"

"This is mere idle speculation, Mr. Wolfe. Did you say all that to the defendant?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long were you with him?"

"Nearly half an hour. I can say a great deal in half an hour."

"No doubt. But the time of the court and jury should not be spent on irrelevancies." Mandelbaum treated the jury to one of his understanding glances, and went back to Wolfe. "You didn't discuss your testimony with the defendant?"

"No, sir."

"Did you make any suggestions to him regarding the conduct of his defense?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, sir. I made no suggestions to him of any kind."

"Did you offer to make any kind of investigation for him as a contribution to his defense?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you seek this interview with him?"

"One moment." Donovan was on his feet. "I submit, Your Honor, that this is the State's witness, and this is not proper direct examination. Surely it is cross-examination, and I object to it."

Judge Corbett nodded. "The objection is sustained. Mr. Mandelbaum, you know the rules of evidence."

"But I am confronted by an unforeseen contingency."

"He is still your witness. Examine him upon the merits."

"Also, Your Honor, he is in contempt."

"Not yet. That is in abeyance. Proceed."

Mandelbaum looked at Wolfe, glanced at the jury, went to the table, stood a moment gazing down at it, lifted his head, said, "No more questions," and sat down.

Jimmy Donovan arose and stepped forward, but addressed the bench instead of the witness stand. "Your Honor, I wish to state that I knew nothing of the meeting this morning, of the witness with my client, either before or after it took place. I only learned of it here and now. If you think it desirable, I will take the stand to be questioned about it under oath."

Judge Corbett shook his head. "I don't think so, Mr. Donovan. Not unless developments suggest it."

"At any time, of course." Donovan turned. "Mr. Wolfe, why did you seek an interview this morning with Mr. Ashe?"

Wolfe was relaxed but not smug. "Because I had acquired information which cast a reasonable doubt on his guilt, and I wanted to get it before the court and the jury without delay. As a witness for the prosecution, with a warrant out for my arrest, I was in a difficult situation. It occurred to me that if I saw and talked with Mr. Ashe the fact would probably be disclosed in the course of my examination by Mr. Mandelbaum; and if so, he would almost certainly ask me what had been said. Therefore I wanted to tell Mr. Ashe what I had surmised and what I had discovered. If Mr. Mandelbaum allowed me to tell all I had said to Mr. Ashe, that would do it. If he dismissed me before I finished, I thought it likely that on cross-examination the defense attorney would give me an opportunity to go on." He turned a palm up. "So I sought an interview with Mr. Ashe."

The judge was frowning. One of the jurors made a noise, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

others looked at him. The audience stirred, and someone tittered. I was thinking Wolfe had one hell of a nerve, but he hadn't violated any law I had ever heard of, and Donovan had asked him a plain question and got a plain answer. I would have given a ream of foolscap to see Donovan's face.

If his face showed any reaction to the suggestion given him, his voice didn't. "Did you say more to Mr. Ashe than you have already testified to?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please tell the jury what you said to him."

"I said that I left this room yesterday morning, deliberately risking a penalty for contempt of court, to explore my surmises. I said that, taking my assistant, Mr. Archie Goodwin, with me, I went to the office of Bagby Answers, Incorporated, on Sixty-ninth Street, where Marie Willis was murdered. I said that from a look at the switchboards I concluded that it would be impossible for any one operator—"

Mandelbaum was up. "Objection, Your Honor. Conclusions of the witness are not admissible."

"He is merely relating," Donovan submitted, "what he said to Mr. Ashe. The Assistant District Attorney asked him to."

"The objection is overruled," Judge Corbett said dryly.

Wolfe resumed. "I said I had concluded that it would be impossible for any one operator to eavesdrop frequently on her lines without the others becoming aware of it, and therefore it must be done collusively if at all. I said that I had spoken at some length with two of the operators, Alice Hart and Bella Velardi, who had been working and living there along with Marie Willis, and had received two encouragements for my surmise: one, that they were visibly disturbed at my declared intention of investigating them fully and ruthlessly, and tolerated my rudeness beyond reason; and two, that it was evident that their personal expenditures greatly exceeded their salaries. I said—may I ask, sir, is it necessary for me to go on repeating that phrase, 'I said'?"

"I think not," Donovan told him. "Not if you confine yourself strictly to what you said to Mr. Ashe this morning."

"I shall do so. The extravagance in personal expenditures was true also of the third operator who had lived and worked there with Marie Willis—Helen Weltz. It was her day off, and Mr. Goodwin and I drove to her place in the country, near Katonah in Westchester County. She was more disturbed even than the other two; she was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

almost hysterical. With her was a man named Guy Unger, and he too was disturbed. After I had stated my intention to investigate everyone connected with Bagby Answers, Incorporated, he asked to speak with me privately and offered me ten thousand dollars for services which he did not specify. I gathered that he was trying to bribe me to keep my hands off, and I declined the offer."

"You said all that to Mr. Ashe?"

"Yes, sir. Meanwhile Helen Weltz had spoken privately with Mr. Goodwin, and had told him she wanted to speak with me, but must get rid of Mr. Unger. She said she would phone my office later. Back in the city, I dared not go to my home, since I was subject to arrest and detention, so Mr. Goodwin and I went to the home of a friend, and Helen Weltz came to us there sometime after midnight. My attack had broken her completely, and she was in terror. She confessed that for years the operation had been used precisely as I had surmised. All the switchboard operators had been parties to it, including Marie Willis. Their dean, Alice Hart, collected information—"

There was an interruption. Alice Hart, on the aisle, with Bella Velardi next to her, got up and headed for the door, and Bella followed her. Eyes went to them from all directions, including Judge Corbett's, but nobody said or did anything, and when they were five steps from the door I sang out to the guard, "That's Alice Hart in front!"

He blocked them off. Judge Corbett called, "Officer, no one is to leave the room!"

The audience stirred and muttered, and some stood up. The judge banged his gavel and demanded order, but he couldn't very well threaten to have the room cleared. Miss Hart and Miss Velardi gave it up and went back to their seats.

When the room was still, the judge spoke to Wolfe. "Go ahead."

He did so. "Alice Hart collected information from them and gave them cash from time to time, in addition to their salaries. Guy Unger and Clyde Bagby also gave them cash occasionally. The largest single amount ever received by Helen Weltz was fifteen hundred dollars, given her about a year ago by Guy Unger. In three years she received a total of approximately fifteen thousand dollars, not counting her salary. She didn't know what use was made of the information she passed on to Alice Hart. She wouldn't admit that she had knowledge that any of it had been used for blackmailing, but she did admit that some of it could have been so used."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you know," Judge Corbett asked him, "where Helen Weltz is now?"

"Yes, sir. She is present. I told her that if she came and faced it, the District Attorney might show appreciation for her help."

"Have you anything to add that you told Mr. Ashe this morning?"

"I have, Your Honor. Do you wish me to differentiate clearly between what Helen Weltz told me and my own exposition?"

"No. Anything whatever that you said to Mr. Ashe."

"I told him that the fact that he had tried to hire me to learn the identity of the Bagby operator who would service his number, and to bribe her to eavesdrop on his line, was one of the points that had caused me to doubt his guilt; that I had questioned whether a man who was reluctant to undertake such a chore for himself would be likely to strangle the life out of a woman and then open a window and yell for the police. Also I asked him about the man who telephoned him to say that if Ashe would meet him at the Bagby office on Sixty-ninth Street he thought they could talk Miss Willis out of it. I asked if it was possible that the voice was Bagby's, and Ashe said it was quite possible, but if so he had disguised his voice."

"Had you any evidence that Mr. Bagby made that phone call?"

"No, Your Honor. All I had, besides my assumptions from known facts and my own observations, was what Miss Weltz had told me. One thing she had told me was that Marie Willis had become an imminent threat to the whole conspiracy. She had been ordered by both Unger and Bagby to accept Ashe's proposal to eavesdrop on his line, and not to tell Mrs. Ashe, whom Miss Willis idolized; and she had refused and announced that she was going to quit. Of course that made her an intolerable peril to everyone concerned. The success and security of the operation hinged on the fact that no victim ever had any reason to suspect that Bagby Answers, Incorporated, was responsible for his distress.

"It was Bagby who got the information, but it was Unger who used it, and the tormented under the screw could not know where the tormentor had got the screw. So Miss Willis' rebellion and decision to quit—combined, according to Miss Weltz, with an implied threat to expose the whole business—were a mortal menace to any and all of them, ample provocation for murder to one willing to risk that extreme. I told Mr. Ashe that all this certainly established a reasonable doubt of his guilt, but I also went beyond that and considered briefly the most likely candidate to replace him. Do you wish that too?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The judge was intent on him. "Yes. Proceed."

"I told Mr. Ashe that I greatly preferred Mr. Bagby. The mutual alibi of Miss Hart and Miss Velardi might be successfully impeached, but they have it, and besides I have seen and talked with them and was not impressed. I exclude Miss Weltz because when she came to me last evening she had been jolted by consternation into utter candor, or I am a witless gull; and that excludes Mr. Unger too, because Miss Weltz claims certain knowledge that he was on his boat in the Sound all that evening.

"As for Mr. Bagby, he had most at stake. He admits that he went to his apartment around the time of the murder, and his apartment is on Seventieth Street, not far from where the murder occurred. I leave the timetable to the police; they are extremely efficient with timetables. Regarding the telephone call, Mr. Ashe said it could have been his voice."

Wolfe pursed his lips. "I think that's all—no, I also told Mr. Ashe that this morning I sent a man, Saul Panzer, to keep an eye on Mr. Bagby's office in Forty-seventh Street, to see that no records are removed or destroyed. I believe that covers it adequately, Your Honor. I would now like to plead to the charge of contempt, both on behalf of Mr. Goodwin and of myself. If I may—"

"No." Judge Corbett was curt. "You know quite well you have made that charge frivolous by the situation you have created. The charge is dismissed. Are you through with the witness, Mr. Donovan?"

"Yes, Your Honor. No more questions."

"Mr. Mandelbaum?"

The Assistant District Attorney got up and approached the bench. "Your Honor will appreciate that I find myself in an extraordinary predicament." He sounded like a man with a major grievance. "I feel that I am entitled to ask for a recess until the afternoon session, to consider the situation and consult with my colleagues. If my request is granted, I also ask that I be given time, before the recess is called, to arrange for five persons in the room to be taken into custody as material witnesses—Alice Hart, Bella Velardi, Helen Weltz, Guy Unger, and Clyde Bagby."

"Very well." The judge raised his eyes and his voice. "The five persons just named will come forward. The rest of you will keep your seats and preserve order."

All of them obeyed but two. Nero Wolfe left the witness chair and stepped down to the floor, and as he did so Robina Keane sprang up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from her place on the front bench, ran to him, threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her cheek against his. As I said before, actresses always act, but I admit that was unrehearsed and may have been artless. In any case, I thoroughly approved, since it indicated that the Ashe family would prove to be properly grateful, which after all was the main point.

The thought may have occurred to you, that's all very nice, and no doubt Ashe sent a handsome check, but after all one reason Wolfe walked out was because he hated to sit against a perfumed woman on a wooden bench waiting for his turn to testify, and he had to do it all over again when the State was ready with its case against the real murderer. It did look for a while as if he might have to face up to that, but a week before the trial opened he was informed that he wouldn't be needed, and he wasn't. They had plenty without him to persuade a jury to bring in a verdict of guilty against Clyde Bagby.

ABOUT OUR COVER

Dear Reader:
Do you prefer one of the following on the cover of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*?

Photograph of mystery author ☐
All-type cover ☐
Artist's illustration ☐

If you do have a preference we'd very much like to know it. A postcard, letter, or this questionnaire will reach us at:

Davis Publications
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
Attention: E. Sullivan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In a minute, when she felt better, she would call the police" . . .

DR. TEMPLE IS DEAD

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Gloria Temple poured some whiskey into her glass without spilling a drop. This was progress; twenty minutes ago she had knocked over the glass with the neck of the bottle and had spent the time since cleaning up her father's desk. It was the fine walnut desk with inlaid green leather and gold embossed top, the one he sat behind when he saw his patients. Once she was started with the sponge and cloth, she went ahead and polished the front and side panels, even the round feet half buried in the pile of the bottle-green broadloom.

Gloria knew she was compulsive when it came to cleaning up a mess. Her session in the bathroom earlier was another example; starting with her father's straight razor, she had gone on to wash and polish the comb, brush, and shaving mug, even though he would never use them again. Still, there were worse habits and it made her feel better to get things organized.

Now Gloria drew the telephone toward her and dialed, checking after each digit to make sure she was getting the number exactly as it was written on the patient's card in her father's neat hand. The patient was Mr. Kamen, S. J., and his appointment was for nine o'clock in the morning—the first on tomorrow's schedule.

As the telephone rang, Gloria sipped whiskey. It was essential that she get through to these people. It would be chaos if they began showing up and found no Dr. Temple.

"Hello?"—a sluggish, middle-aged voice.

"Mr. Kamen?"

"Speaking."

"This is Gloria Temple, Dr. Temple's daughter."

"Yes?" A defensive note crept in.

"I'm sorry but I have bad news. My father is dead. I thought I should tell you right away because I know you were expecting to see him tomorrow."

"Dead? What happened?"

© *1979 by William Bankier.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He took a nap late this afternoon. I went in to call him and found him lying there. He was—he was all right. I mean there was no suffering. He died very suddenly and very peacefully in his sleep."

There was silence on the line. Then: "But what am I going to do? Who will I see? Dr. Temple is the only one who understands my—"

"I know. This is going to be difficult for you and all the other patients until you can get re-established with another analyst. But I'm sure my father's colleagues will help and you'll be hearing from one of them soon. If you need help in the next few days, I suggest you call Mt. Hope Hospital. They can advise you."

Gloria put down the phone on a stunned Mr. Kamen. Her glass was almost empty—she was sure she had poured more than that. As she refilled it, she realized that her father was not going to come into the room and take away the bottle. She was free to drink herself to death, the end he had so often predicted for her. There must be worse ways to go.

Gloria remembered the body on the bed and realized she ought to telephone somebody about it. Police probably; they had ambulances. But the patients came first—how often had she heard her father say that? Five years ago, when her mother was still alive, Mrs. Temple used to complain: "You paid taxes on more than a hundred thousand dollars last year, Raphael. We don't need all that money. We need a husband and father."

As always, Dr. Raphael Temple produced his mild smile and let the argument blow away. "I'm not selling shoes," he would say. "These people are sick, they need me. The patients come first."

Gloria loved her father. He was the handsomest, kindest man she had ever known. She could recall the early years when she was in primary school and he was still getting started. He was at home more in those days, and they went for walks after supper and on weekends. He held her on one arm outside the apartment building as the sun went down and she could smell his cologne and feel the heat from his face. It was like being held by a big warm tree.

Then he became busy so she got busy too and they saw less of each other. For a few months after her mother's funeral she thought they were drawing together again. He rang her at the agency where she worked and they met for lunch. They went to a couple of plays and attended an important indoor tennis match. She was 24 years old now and he was still so youthful-looking that they made an attractive couple.

Until Abigail Peterson came along. Gloria never learned where

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he found Abigail, nor did she care. The hell of it was that the buxom architect began to dominate Raphael Temple's life. He found time for *her* all right. His first vacation in six years was spent in Bermuda with that Peterson person—he brought back snapshots to show the fun they had. Blonde indecent cow!

Gloria dialed the next number. This was Mrs. Easterby whose appointment was for eleven the next morning. "Mrs. Easterby? It's Gloria Temple, Dr. Temple's daughter."

"What's wrong?"

"I have bad news. My father died suddenly this evening. Since your appointment is for tomorrow morning—"

"Is this some sort of joke?" Mrs. Easterby could not believe the message because the voice on the telephone sounded drunk and belligerent.

"It's no joke." Gloria reined back her feelings. She was still able to do this when necessary; her sessions with Dr. Sills had helped in that direction. "Dr. Temple died in his sleep a short while ago. All appointments have had to be canceled." She went on to explain the emergency arrangements and finally hung up on Mrs. Easterby who sounded on the verge of tears.

What would Dr. Sills say about Gloria's falling off the wagon this way? Her feelings for Morton Sills were almost as strong as those for her father—in fact, they were all mixed up together, and she recognized this for the truth. It was the subject of many of their early sessions when she had submitted at last to her father's persistent suggestions that she see someone.

"This jealousy of yours towards Abigail is not healthy, dear," her father told her. "A certain amount of resentment is normal. But you are far beyond that level. It's no good my talking to you—a third party is needed. Let me give you Mort Sills's number. Call him, you'll like him."

She did like Dr. Sills from the very beginning. He was quite similar to her father physically—a man in his late forties with salt-and-pepper hair and a heavy face with pleasant wrinkles beside the eyes. After an initial period of deep reserve she broke the ice and found she was able to talk easily. But still she talked only about comparatively trivial things; her essential hostility remained buried so deeply that she herself only suspected its existence.

In time the usual transference took place and Dr. Sills became the most important man in her life. She called him Mort, he called her Gloria. She maneuvered him into meeting her for coffee and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vowed that she intended to go on seeing him after her therapy was finished. As always, he listened quietly, not saying much, as if the very fact of the words flowing out of her was enough.

It was not enough. It would never be enough.

Phone call by phone call, Gloria made her way through the appointments calendar. It began to look as if the bottle was not going to see her to the end of the list. Fair enough; she had advised the patients for the next four days. The rest could be telephoned tomorrow.

She got up from the desk and walked to the couch. She sat down. Then she lay back and closed her eyes. There was a couch in Mort's office but she always spent the fifty minutes sitting in a chair. They never used the couch—except for that one time. Had it really happened? The whiskey and her own confusion were loosening Gloria Temple's hold on reality. The things she wanted from Mort and the things that had actually taken place between them were beginning to blur together.

No sense falling asleep in her father's office. Gloria got up and staggered as she moved back to the desk. There was something else she had to do—what was it? Yes, call the police and have them come and take away the body.

The police would be unhappy, she realized, at being brought in so late. There had been light in the apartment when she made the discovery but now the windows were dark. A thought struck her. What if he was not dead after all? What if they came in response to her call and found him sleeping? That would be an embarrassing situation. And all those patients to be rung back, all of them thinking the doctor's daughter must be crazy.

The idea of her father waking from a much-needed nap took over in Gloria's mind. She saw him sitting up on the bed, his hair tousled on the sides, his voice confused. She started to cry, heavy tears streaming down her cheeks, the first release since it happened.

She took the empty bottle to the kitchen and set it out on the back landing beside the bin. She dried her face with a dish towel. Then she walked down the corridor to the bedroom door, opened it, and went into the darkened room.

She knew from the silence that he was really dead. She was alone in the world. No more father, the best there was even though he had switched his affections to Abigail Peterson. And now no more Morton since his insistence that their relationship had grown too close for comfort.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm more to blame than you are, Gloria," she remembered him saying. "I should have seen it coming and should have avoided it. I guess I'm only human. I'm sorry. Here's the name of a colleague who has time for another patient. Call him, he's a good man." That was what she was being given in place of his love—a scrap of paper with a name on it.

She went to the bed and looked down at the body, the salt-and-pepper hair against the shadowy pillow, the blanket drawn up to the chin. She lay down on top of the blanket and closed her eyes. In a minute, when she felt better, she would call the police.

The sound of the door opening did not disturb her but when the overhead light snapped on, she sat up. She was confused, dragged out of deep sleep. Her father crossed the room, setting down his suitcase.

"Gloria? What the hell—"

"Daddy?"

"You're drunk, aren't you? I go away for one night and you—" He glanced at a crumpled slip of paper on the bureau, smoothed it out, and read the scribbled name of a psychiatrist he knew vaguely. His daughter's companion had not moved. Dr. Temple approached with an expression of curiosity on his face. "I don't much appreciate your using my bed—"

He stood still for a moment, then reached down and drew back the blanket. She watched his reaction as he stared at the slashed throat and the bloodstained sheets. "Good God, no," Dr. Temple said. "Mort."

Gloria felt like laughing, so she did. "Oui," she said in high-school French. "Il est mort."

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Schlock Homes story by

ROBERT L. FISH

The "vorld's vurst conzulting detectiff" detects again, and if it is possible to conceive, the one and only Schlock Homes outdoes himself. Above the top of his form, the Great Schlock blazes with deductions and theories, and comes to some of the most startling conclusions of his "conzulting" career . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PATIENT RESIDENT

by ROBERT L. FISH

It was when interesting cases were either rare or non-existent that my friend Mr. Schlock Homes found life most difficult to bear, nor was he loath to pass on his feelings of frustration to me. It made for uncomfortable moments for me, but at the same time the hiatus in work allowed me the necessary time to bring some order to my voluminous notes regarding the many cases I was privileged to share with the man a German acquaintance of ours called, in his delightful accent, the "vorld's vurst conzulting detectiff."

I recall in particular one warm sunny afternoon in June in the year '77, with the shadows just beginning to creep across the ceiling of our quarters at 221B Bagel Street. Homes and I had recently returned home from a visit to France. There, in the chief city of the *département* of the Rhone, my friend had successfully tracked down a miscreant using the sewers of the city to give the place a bad odor. I was in the process of putting my notes together under the tentative title of *The Adventure of the Lyons' Main*, while Homes, bored almost to distraction by not having a problem to occupy him, was slouched in the basket chair with his violin, playing what even to my untutored ear sounded like *An Err on the G-String*. I had just

© *1979 by Robert L. Fish.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decided that some liquid refreshment might aid in my literary efforts, when there came a diffident knock on the door and a moment later our page had entered with the late afternoon post.

Homes quickly put aside his instrument, eagerly taking the packet from the boy and tearing the letters open in order, anxiously seeking some missive that might indicate a problem to test his enormous energies and massive brain. With a sigh I brought my attention from the sideboard to watch, wondering what new adventure for us might be concealed in the formidable pile of correspondence; but as Homes tossed aside piece after piece once he had perused it, and as the smiling look of anticipation on his lean face slowly turned to one of growing disappointment, I shook my head and returned to contemplating the sideboard. Suddenly there was a muffled exclamation from my friend and I looked over at him once again to see Homes gripping an envelope in his hand and staring at it with concentration.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

"Later, Watney," he said impatiently, and reached behind him for one of his reference books. He brought it down, found the page he sought, and ran his finger down a column; but instead of satisfying whatever curiosity had led him to the book in the first place, the information he found seemed to puzzle him further. With a frown he returned the book to its proper place on the shelf and continued to finger the envelope as if intrigued by it.

"But, Homes," I repeated. "What *is* it?"

"A rather interesting problem," he replied, and tapped the envelope with his finger. "To begin with, the letter appears to have been misdirected, for it is not addressed to me, but rather to a certain 'The Resident.' I can only assume the 'The' to be an abbreviation for the name 'Theodore,' but there is no Theodore Resident in the London Directory. As a matter of fact, the directory shows no person named Resident with any first name."

"How extremely odd, Homes!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he replied. "Still, the address is quite clear—221B Bagel Street—so I can only assume the message was intended for me, although the false name, I am sure, has some meaning for the writer."

With a shrug that indicated he was merely putting the matter of the name aside for the moment and would return to it in time, he slit the envelope with his pocket-knife and withdrew the contents, unfolding the single sheet the envelope contained. I rose and came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to stand at my friend's side, reading over his shoulder. The sheet he had unfolded appeared to me to be nothing more than an ordinary advertisement, and one which made little sense to me. Little did I know that the words on that innocent-looking sheet of paper were to lead to one of Homes's most interesting cases, and one which I now find in my notes as *The Adventure of the Patient Resident*. At the moment I was only puzzled at the strange words, which I reproduce below for the reader:

GRAND PREMIERE
NEW PANCRAS CINEMA
INTERNATIONAL WEEK

Sunday ..... DANDY IN ASPIC
Monday ..... UNDERCOVER
Tuesday ..... RULERS OF THE SEA
Wednesday ..... STROMBOLI
Thursday ..... ENCOUNTERS
Friday ..... MORT DU CYGNE
Saturday ..... RASHOMON

45 Lyme Street—Basement

"Homes," I cried, "what nonsense! Can you make the slightest sense of this gibberish?"

"Oh, I should hardly call it gibberish," Homes replied, with that insufferable air of superiority he always employed when explaining something which was clear as crystal to him, but which I found unfathomable. "It is, as you can see, an advertisement."

"I understand that, Homes," I said, hurt that he should think me that obtuse. "But for what?"

"Really, Watney," he said, frowning at me. "At times you try my patience. It is, obviously, an advertisement for a new restaurant. And," he added, wrinkling his nose, "an advertisement I find unbearably offensive in its attempt to be what the newer generation calls 'cute.' I am, as you know, Watney, a most patient man, but there are limits to that patience. I find as I grow older an increasing dislike for that childish attempt at cleverness as evidenced by this advertisement. The idiots," he added, "are also unable to spell!"

"Spell? Cute? A new restaurant, Homes?" I asked, mystified, and considered the advertisement again. "Is that what a 'cinema' is?"

"I have no idea what the derivation of the word might be," he replied. "It sounds like an Indian spice, possibly related to cinnamon,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but definitely culinary. Still, to think of *any* spice, particularly cinnamon, being added to pancreas—which they have misspelled, and which we know as sweetbreads—is unthinkable!"

I stared in profound admiration as my friend ran his finger down the list and continued his discourse.

"Whatever they refer to in the argot as being 'dandy,' I cannot imagine it, or anything else, being smothered in aspic!

"Undercover!" said he with a snort. "Possibly pheasant, or more likely, simple chicken. And if pheasant, undoubtedly of poor quality or they would have identified more precisely what they are serving under cover!

"The rulers of the sea, of course, are shark, and while I have heard that some people consider the flesh of this predator to be palatable, I should not care for it myself."

I nodded in agreement. "And the stromboli?"

"An Italian pasta, obviously. You see, they advertise the cuisine as being of international character." He continued down the list. "And the fact that on Thursdays they openly admit they serve *en counters,* and not on the regular tables, undoubtedly to save napery, does not speak very highly of the establishment. Not to mention the fact that they wait until Saturday, when they have the leftovers of the entire week at their disposal, before they serve Japanese food!"

"The cygne I understand," I said, proud to be able to contribute. "That is the French word for swan, is it not?"

"Yes. Although," Homes added cynically, "in all probability they will merely serve pressed duck."

"But, Homes," I said as a thought struck me, "who could this Mort be?"

"Most probably a tailor in the neighborhood who presses it, since I doubt a restaurant of this calibre would have a presser of their own." He shook his head. "No, Watney, I fear this is one eating establishment we shall not patronise!"

"A pity in a way, Homes," I remarked wistfully. "I have been tiring a bit of late of Mrs. Essex's fried chutneys."

"On the other hand," Homes pointed out, his eyes twinkling, "the advertisement speaks nothing of a lounge."

I looked over his shoulder and saw it was true. No refreshments!

"A place like that should be barred," I said with feeling, and was about to return in disgust to my labours when Homes suddenly frowned, his former good humour gone as quickly as it had come.

"What is it, Homes?" I inquired anxiously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Has it occurred to you, Watney," he said, staring at the sheet of paper in all seriousness, almost as if he were seeing it for the first time, "that it is exceedingly odd that this advertisement, intended to interest its readers in a new restaurant, should be sent to me? While I have no objection to a proper meal now and then, nobody, I warrant, would call me a gourmet."

"True, Homes," I said, thinking about it, and then recalled something else. "But the message was not sent to you, but to this Theodore Resident. Possibly he—"

"Come, come, Watney! At *my* address? Possibly, next to 10 Downing Street and the Lyons Corner House, the most famous address in all London?" He shook his head and reviewed the advertisement as he spoke. "No, Watney, there is something here that requires further study." He glanced up at me significantly. "I shall probably be busy attempting to make sense of this message for some time," he said. "Why don't you take the opportunity to verify the pub closing hours and see if they might have been changed in the past fortnight?"

"An excellent suggestion, Homes!" I cried, and then suddenly paused, eyeing him dubiously. "But will you not require my assistance?"

"I shall do my best to manage without you, Watney," said he, heavily.

"Very well, then," said I, and went down the steps, remarking to myself, as always, at the true unselfishness of my old friend.

It was just after eleven that evening that I returned to our rooms, having verified that not one of the pubs within a two-mile radius had changed their hours by so much as a minute. I went up the stairs, surprised to find them a bit steeper than usual, prepared to tell Homes about the closing hours and receive his congratulations on a job well done, but just as I was about to enter, I heard a loud exclamation from within. Without further ado I burst through the door to find Homes staring at the advertisement in horror.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

"I am a fool!" he cried.

"Well, sometimes you do seem a bit—" I began, but before I could continue, Homes had come to his feet and was moving rapidly towards his rooms.

"Later, Watney," he said. "It is good you have come, and when you did! There is not a moment to lose! One second while I change

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into more suitable raiment and we shall be off."

"Off, Homes?" I asked, stifling a yawn, and moved towards the sideboard to see if possibly the liquid fare I had been subjected to in the course of my scientific experiment that evening had its equal in our more limited stock. But before I could check more than one or two mixtures, Homes had come hurrying from his room dressed for the street, and had grasped me by the arm.

"Be careful, Homes!" I cried. "You will spill it!"

He paid me no heed. "You have your pistol, Watney?"

"It's around somewhere, I believe, Homes," I replied, and tasted my drink. But before I even had a chance to make a decent judgment, Homes was joggling my arm again.

"Well, get it!" he said savagely. "I have my bull's-eye lantern under my Inverness, and my own revolver in my pocket. We must hurry if we are to prevent this foul crime from being consummated!"

"What foul crime, Homes?" I asked, and began looking about vaguely for my pistol.

"I will tell you on the way," he replied fiercely, and picked my pistol from its usual place on the desk and thrust it savagely into my pocket. I was about to remonstrate that I was wearing my best suit, but Homes had already plunged down the steps and I could hear him at the kerb calling feverishly at a passing carriage.

I barely had time to finish my drink when his voice came up the stairwell, demanding my presence. With a sigh I descended, finding the steps even steeper than before. Homes had managed a hansom and was already inside. He grasped my arm to drag me aboard, and I fell back into my seat, closing my eyes, as Homes called up loudly to our driver.

"45 Lyme Street, and a tanner extra if you get us there in five minutes, driver!"

Our jehu needed no further persuasion, and as he cracked his whip over his horse's head we took off with a bound over the rough cobblestones. Homes leaned over and shook me. I sighed.

"All right, Homes," I said, trying to sit a bit more erect. "What is this all about? Where are we going?"

"To that restaurant we saw advertised," he replied grimly.

"But, Homes," I said, surprised, "it has no bar! Besides, I thought you held the place in contempt. Also, to tell you the truth, I've been eating so many cashews to-night that I really have little appetite."

"You do not understand, Watney," he said fiercely, and reached for the advertisement in his pocket. He pulled it out but before he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unfolded it, he looked at me. "Tell me, Watney, have you ever listed the days of the week in their alphabetical order?"

"Why, no, Homes," I said, thinking about it, and then added apologetically, "I've never really felt the need to, you see."

"Well," Homes said, heavily, "had you done so you would have noticed they come in the order of Friday, Monday, Saturday, Sunday, Thursday, Tuesday, and Wednesday."

"Really, Homes?" I murmured.

"Yes. And had you paid the slightest attention to the menus offered on this advertisement," said he coldly, unfolding the sheet and thrusting it under my nose as if expecting me to be able to read it by the intermittent light cast by the passing gas-lamps, "you might have noticed that the first letters of the various dishes for the weekdays in alphabetical order, spell out a word!"

"How interesting, Homes," I said, yawning.

"Exactly! For the word is—murders!"

"Oh? But by what means will this foul scheme be perpetrated?" I asked, blinking rapidly to keep awake. "A tailor's awl in the pressed duck? Or from the natural declination of week-old leftovers in the Rashomon dish?" I immediately wished I had not mentioned the latter, and leaned further to get some fresh air.

"By nothing that simple," said Homes, his face a mask of sternness. "Once I had the basics of the scheme, it was easily supposed that if the first letters of the cuisine formed an anagram of the word 'murders,' then quite obviously the answer lay in an anagram of the final letters!"

"And did it, Homes?" I asked, yearning for my bed.

"It did, indeed. And the word was—arsenic!"

"What word was arsenic, Homes?" I began, but before he could answer we had come with a clatter into Lyme Street and had pulled up before Number 45, the hansom horse heaving and frothing. In a trice Homes was on the pavement, flinging our fare with the tip to our driver, and had pulled me from my comfortable place as our cab moved away in the night.

I looked about. The establishment before which we stood was dark, and I hoped that Homes would recognise the fact and allow us to return to Bagel Street and our comfortable beds. But Homes did not seem at all surprised by the darkness but moved instead stealthily in the direction of the rear of the building.

"Homes!" I said crossly. "What are we doing here at this hour? The place is obviously closed."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Exactly, Watney," he said with a tinge of excitement in his voice. "Much better that we get into their kitchen when there are no chefs about with cleavers! And should they have left guards on the premises, we have our weapons! Come!"

"Come where, Homes?" I asked a bit petulantly.

"I said—but never mind! We are wasting time. Once we have located the kitchen and discovered the whereabouts of this arsenic and have removed it, I shall leave the proprietor a note telling him that all is known. I rather doubt they will attempt this malfeasance in the future."

As he had been speaking we had arrived at the rear of the building, and Homes immediately tackled the door-lock with his set of picks. A moment later and we could hear the click as the tumblers gave way to his skill. "Come, Watney," he said in a whisper, "and have your pistol ready!"

"Ready for what, Homes?" I began, but he had already turned the knob and was prepared to enter. With one last look over his shoulder to make sure I was with him, he took a deep breath and swung the door wide.

There was total silence for a moment, and then we seemed to hear a faint murmur of sound from somewhere below. Homes slid back the cover of his bull's-eye lantern and swung the steady beam about. We were in some sort of storehouse, it appeared, although in one corner we were able to see a set of steps leading downward.

"Of course," Homes whispered. "The advertisement said basement."

He withdrew his gun and with his weapon ready and his lantern beam on the stair steps, he led the way. Slowly we descended, and as we did so the strange sounds we had been hearing seemed to grow louder. At the bottom of the steps we saw a heavy velour curtain which seemed to contain a good portion of the strange sounds we had been hearing.

Homes instantly covered the lantern and in total darkness we groped our way to the curtain. A quick touch on my shoulder to assure me he was ready and to warn me to be prepared with my own weapon, and Homes in a sudden dramatic move swept aside the curtain.

It was close to his final move, for there before us, bearing down on us, was a huge locomotive. I at once recognised the sounds we had been hearing through the intervening curtain. The engine was getting closer as we stood, transfixed, while the great monster

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loomed nearer and nearer, its stack spewing black smoke, its wheels clattering over the rails, its whistle screaming its warning.

Suddenly Homes woke from his trance and had grasped me and dragged me back through the curtain, our weapons forgotten. We hurried up the steps and out into the evening air. Once clear, Homes leaned against the wall, wiping perspiration from his brow.

"A close call, that, Watney," said he and took a deep breath. "But at least we need not worry about the future of that murderous establishment."

"How is that, Homes?" I asked, awake at last from the terrible fright I had just suffered.

"The fools have located their restaurant on the tracks of the King's Cross railway tunnel," said he, and despite our close call he could not help but smile. "I doubt they will have any customers at all, with all that noise and smoke!"

And he walked calmly to the kerb to hail a cab.

I came to breakfast a bit late the following morning. For some unknown reason I had awakened with a headache and had remained abed a while to allow it to abate. Homes had already completed his repast and was seated at his desk, poring over the London Directory. I seated myself and had scarcely begun to butter a chutney, shuddering a bit as I did so, when suddenly Homes looked up with a loud exclamation.

"Not so loud, please, Homes," I said. "What is it?"

"I am a fool!" he cried.

"Could I answer that later, Homes?" I began. "At the moment I really am in no state—"

But he was paying me no attention. "The misdirected letter!" he cried, his finger pressed tightly to an entry in the directory. "I should have considered the possibility that the writer was dyslectic! Of course! The letter was meant to be addressed to Mr. Theodore Bagel at 221B Resident Street!"

He swung about, bringing down another volume, swiftly leafing through it to the entry he sought. He looked up, his face grim.

"As I suspected, Mr. Bagel is a chemist, undoubtedly with the ability to obtain arsenic at his convenience! And although his scheme may have failed in this one instance, there is no telling where and when he may try it in another place. A letter to this Mr. Bagel, if you will, Watney! Possibly once he knows that Schlock Homes is onto his murderous scheme, he will desist!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DETECTIVERSE

by MARGUERITE BURANELLI

FIRST PRINCIPLE

A chemist, quite rich, published tomes
On carbon and chloride and chromes.
"The work seems to pay,"
Said Sherlock one day.
"ELEMENT-ary, I'm sure, Mr. Holmes."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A chap called Llewellyn L. Wilde,
Meeting Sherlock Holmes, was beguiled.
"A Welshman well named,"
The great one proclaimed.
"L-ementary," the Cardiffman smiled.

UPWARD MOBILITY

Said Watson to trainman Joe Blotson,
"I see you at work quite a lot, son.
"Your job's, in the main,
"High off the terrain."
"EL-ementary, my dear Dr. Watson."

TREE SURGEON

Said Watson to forester Dotson
While pruning a tree in the hot sun,
"It's too warm a day
"For working, I'd say."
"ELM-entary, my dear Dr. Watson."

© 1979 by Marguerite Buranelli.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

FOR THE LIBRARY: Mystery fiction is often (sometimes correctly, alas) regarded as minor fiction, created quickly for instant consumption and no more memorable than a TV dinner. The best writers, however, produce works of enduring value and their books should be had in fine cloth volumes to rest permanently on the library shelf. One such author is the eminent Grand Master, Ross Macdonald, whose publisher has just issued *Archer in Jeopardy* (Knopf, $14.95), a trio of three of his finest detective novels: *The Doomsters, The Zebra-Striped Hearse,* and *The Instant Enemy.* Here, in a single hefty, solid-feeling tome, enhanced by an illuminating (if so brief as to border on the trivial) foreword, is the sort of book to which one can turn every few years with a certainty of pleasure. Since no new Lew Archer novel has been published since *The Blue Hammer* in 1976, *Archer in Jeopardy* may help to ease the hunger for more adventures of the consummate American private eye.

FOR THE GAME ROOM: E. R. Emmet is a mathematical trickster who apparently enjoys bamboozling people with tricks and games. Barnes and Noble has just published *The Great Detective Puzzle Book* ($2.95, paper) containing 51 puzzles, 25 of which involve Professor Knowall and his bumbling assistant, Sergeant Simple. It is all too tough for me, but if you are smart enough this little book should be fun.

FOR THE BEDROOM: The perfect book to take to bed to help you doze off at night is John Ball's *The Murder Children* (Dodd, Mead, $8.95), a novel of Los Angeles street gangs and their brand of terrorism.

FOR THE LABORATORY: It was inevitable. Sherlock Holmes has met Jack the Ripper so frequently in recent fictional works that the two must surely be weary of each other's company. There would be no point in another book pitting them against each other. Likewise his sanguinary wars with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Count Dracula have been chronicled by so many writers that it is difficult to count them all, and further narratives would necessarily be pale and bloodless. Holmes's myriad battles with the diabolical Professor Moriarty have been reiterated nearly to the brink of ennui. A new villain was needed to test Holmes's energetic intellect. A new foe, a new monster (who must also be old, of course, with his own charisma), had to test the mettle of the master detective.

Who better than the two-faced Dr. Jekyll, Robert Louis Stevenson's portrait of distilled Evil? In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes* (Doubleday, $8.95), another Watsonian manuscript has been discovered, this time edited by Loren D. Estleman, clearly a better editor than some others who have been fortunate enough to find Watson's papers in recent years. Having previously been responsible for *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula,* it is not unreasonable to presume that Mr. Estleman is hard at work on *Sherlock Holmes vs. Fu Manchu.* Can *Sherlock Holmes vs. The Creature from the Black Lagoon* be far behind?

FOR THE ALLEY: A fine little amateur publication which should be known to all fans of private detectives and hard-boiled fiction is *The Not So Private Eye,* published by Andy Jaysnovitch on a more-or-less quarterly basis. It contains, as might be expected, articles, reviews, interviews, and even a little fiction, all dealing with the subject suggested by the periodical's title. The current (#6) issue is $1.50, back issues are available for less, and Mr. Jaysnovich may be reached at 6 Dana Estates Drive, Parlin, N.J. 08859.

© *1979 by Otto Penzler.*

BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The English film *Peeping Tom* was released a year before *Psycho,* and like the latter it deals with a young madman caught in the horror of his own works—a grim and powerful cinematic experience. But, unlike *Psycho,* the first film nearly ruined the career of its creator, the man who after Hitchcock is surely the greatest director England has ever produced, Michael Powell. Recently Powell saw his vision vindicated when *Peeping Tom* was screened and hailed by a distinguished audience at the New York Film Festival—twenty years after it was made. Now somewhat frail, but still very urbane and witty, Powell discussed with EQMN some of his contributions to the thriller across a long screen career.

In the primitive early days of the British film studios young

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Powell worked on scenarios with an only slightly older (six years) Alfred Hitchcock. His first directorial chores included such quickie melodramas as *Rynox* and *The Rasp* (both 1931 and adapted from Philip MacDonald books). He first teamed up with his longtime collaborator, Emeric Pressburger, to direct *U-Boat 29*—released in this country as *The Spy in Black*—a 1939 look back at German espionage activities in Scotland and surrounding waters during World War I; a first-rate thriller with the impressively sinister Conrad Veidt in the title role and some really surprising midfilm twists. The following year Veidt comes to *our* side in the Powell film, *Contraband* (called here *Blackout*); he's a heroic Danish sea captain aiding agent Valerie Hobson trap spies using a movie theater as a front. That year also saw the release of *The Thief of Bagdad*, codirected by Powell, a towering fantasy featuring Veidt as one of the screen's truly great villains. He plays the evil grand vizier Jaffar with such demonic intensity one might well believe he conjures up black spells and storms at sea. (In German silents the actor had played such roles as Caligari's somnambulist, the mesmeric Cagliostro, and the man on whom was grafted the hands of Orlac.)

The war years were busy for Powell. *The 49th Parallel* (1941, also titled *The Invaders*) tells of a group of beached Nazi U-boat sailors cutting across Canada; similarly—although far more heroically—in *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942) RAF pilots crash-land in the Netherlands and try to make it back to England. *The Red Shoes* (1948) dazzled audiences; Powell's vision of psychological possession in the world of the ballet—a young dancer hypnotized by an impresario into, ultimately, madness and suicide—was strange and haunting. *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951) was stranger yet: a glittering, highly cinematic yet faithful treatment of the Offenbach opera about the young poet Hoffman's dark, bizarre dreams. Brooding and mysterious, it was an extravaganza for very special tastes and did not become a box-office success. (Also during this period Powell directed England's best-known fantasy, *Stairway to Heaven*, and its best post-war suspense drama, *The Small Back Room*.)

In 1959 Powell was approached by writer Leo Marks to collaborate on a feature on Freud. (Marks was later to write the spy thriller *Sebastian* and *Twisted Nerve*.) A film on Freud having already been in the works, Powell and Marks turned to another sort of story: a young, nice-seeming cinematographer so twisted in his childhood by his scientist father's experiments (in brief flashbacks Powell himself plays the father) in filming fear that the boy embarks on gruesome experiments of his own—murdering young women and recording their terror. *Peeping Tom* is quite properly horrifying, but it is also poetic and sensitive—there is not one drop of blood to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen, and the doomed love affair between the young man (Carl Boehm) and a girl in his rooming house (Anna Massey) is extremely affecting. The ending is powerful enough to leave you limp.

So strong, indeed, was the film that British critics reacted against it.

Powell recalls: "The reception of the film was a disaster for me, ruined me. After *Peeping Tom*, it was impossible to get backing for other projects." A severely cut version was briefly released in the United States and retitled *Face of Fear*—not too unsuitable a substitution. But it soon disappeared, while films much bloodier and with far less soul prospered in the intervening years.

Then the dynamic young director Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver, Mean Streets*) discovered the film, and set in motion the reappraisal which allowed it to be this year's New York Film Festival smash. Michael Powell himself will soon have a retrospective of his work at Harvard University and at the Museum of Modern Art – fitting enough tribute to a writer-director who in an extraordinarily rich range of films did not hesitate to explore the wilder, darker shores of man's nature.

© 1979 by Chris Steinbrunner.

INTERVIEW: RICHARD LEVINSON AND WILLIAM LINK

Having written, created, or produced (and often all three) some of the best television series of all time, including *Columbo, Ellery Queen, Mannix,* and *McCloud,* Levinson and Link (as unfailingly linked as Laurel and Hardy or Damon and Pythias) were presented with a special Edgar Allan Poe award from the Mystery Writers of America this past year for their contribution to the art of mystery.

EQMM: When did you first collaborate?

LEVINSON: We were in the seventh grade. I can't remember the year.

LINK: 1946.

EQMM: You were about thirteen years old.

LINK: Yes. We met on the first day of junior high school, which is the seventh grade.

LEVINSON: We began doing radio dramas on wire recorders, and began writing unsaleable short stories, school plays, entering writing contests.

LINK: Don't forget the school musical.

LEVINSON: The first thing we ever wrote was a Sam Spade skit.

EQMM: What was your first published piece?

LINK: A short story titled "Whistling While You Work" published in *EQMM.* That was in our freshman year in college.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEVINSON: We wrote it in our senior year in high school and it was published a year later.

LINK: We were both going to go into Business at the University of Pennsylvania. Then, when the story was published in *EQMM*, we said, "Hey, we're not going into Business. We're going to be authors."

LEVINSON: We had been submitting to *EQMM* for years. In fact, that's where we had sent our first story, when we were thirteen. You know, the story had a good premise: the Mystery Writers of America solved the crime.

EQMM: Have you ever written independently of each other?

LEVINSON & LINK: No.

EQMM: What is the big current project?

LEVINSON: We've written a mystery play called *Guilty Conscience.*

LINK: It's slated for Broadway (fingers crossed) in the spring or summer. Then we are going to do a thriller, a feature film. It's largely plotted, we have the characters, we have the murderer, we know how he did it. It has an impossible crime in it, too.

LEVINSON: Woody Allen said he wants to do a murder mystery in which the murderer doesn't appear. He will appear in the sequel.

EQMM: How do you work together? Does one do the plotting, the other the dialogue?

LEVINSON: We both do everything. We sit in a room and we are both present for the writing of every word.

LINK: The hardest part is structuring it. That sometimes takes weeks.

LEVINSON: One point that seems especially vital is that reading mystery fiction as a child helps give you a sense of structure. Many young writers working for television or motion pictures just don't have it. You need the sense of sequential narrative. Their characters are good, their dialogue is good, but the idea of developing a story is lacking. The mystery can teach that.

LINK: The mystery is storytelling at its best.

EQMM: Do you always get along well when you work together?

LEVINSON: We produce, as well as write, for television. There is no time for temperament. As long as there is a television network, we don't have to get mad at each other.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Kyd holds a peculiar fascination for mystery writers—or at least his name does. When the renowned Shakespeare scholar Alfred Harbage wrote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mystery fiction, he chose Kyd's name as his pseudonym, and now one of the newest in the long roll of California private eyes also bears the name.

**** Timothy Harris: *Good Night and Good-bye,* Delacorte, $8.95. Thomas Kyd's second recorded case (and first in U.S. hardcover) tells the old tale of the mendacious, enigmatic beauty and the smitten shamus but tells it exceedingly well. The quality of Harris's writing, more than any special originality in plot, character, or background, makes this the best private-eye novel I've read in quite a while.

**** Thomas Gifford: *Hollywood Gothic,* Putnam, $10.95. A fugitive screenwriter tries to prove somebody else used his Oscar to brain his estranged wife. This is another scintillating writing job, offering a vivid if downbeat picture of Southern California and the movie colony. Some of the characters—particularly an aged Hollywood mogul and a teenaged Edward G. Robinson mimic—should live long in the reader's memory, as should the rain-drenched atmosphere.

*** Frank Parrish: *Sting of the Honeybee,* Dodd, Mead, $7.95. Dan Mallett, rural English poacher, is more Robin Hood than detective in this second adventure, beautifully written and full of striking nature passages. Though the plot is reminiscent of an old-fashioned stage melodrama, the figures of hero, villain, and victims are all far from standard.

*** Donald Olson: *Sleep Before Evening,* St. Martin's, $8.95. Olson's second novel, a diverting account of tangled relationships, is long on atmosphere and plotting, short on sympathetic characters. Genealogist Devillo Green is a truly memorable villain.

*** Robert B. Parker: *Wilderness,* Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, $8.95. Here is a genuinely suspenseful tale of outdoor revenge, centered on a middle-aged writer with a machismo hang-up and his college professor-wife. Parker is a very readable writer, and he involves his readers in the lives of his characters so completely they will even put up with some laughably pretentious dialogue.

*** William L. DeAndrea: *The HOG Murders,* Avon, $1.95. A promising new Great Detective candidate, Professor Niccolo Benedetti, finds a worthy opponent in HOG, perhaps the most terrifying versatile serial killer in mystery annals. Fair play is manifest, and the solution is so logical and inevitable that many readers will probably anticipate it. On balance, this is probably a better book than the author's Edgar-winning debut, *Killed in the Ratings* (1978).

*** Simon Brett: *A Comedian Dies,* Scribners, $7.95. Although actor-sleuth Charles Paris is not at his best in this fifth adventure —Brett's plot is his weakest to date, and Charles's detecting is ineffectual to the end—the background of British nightclubs and television and the beautifully

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drawn character of comebacking comedian Willie Barber save the day.

*** Michelle Collins: *Murder at Willow Run,* Zebra Mystery Puzzler #32, $1.95. The story of a locked-room murder in an upstate New York artists' community is a smoothly professional job, the best Zebra sealed-ending mystery I've sampled to date. (Note for pseudonym buffs: Clues to the contrary, I am assured that this Collins is *not* Dennis Lynds.)

** Robert Bloch: *There Is a Serpent in Eden,* Zebra, $2.25. A retirement community provides the scene for Bloch's latest suspense novel, packed as usual with puns, nostalgia, and downbeat social commentary. This is minor Bloch, with twists easier to anticipate than usual, but it is never less than readable and entertaining.

** Anthony Shaffer: *Murderer,* Marion Boyars, $3.95. This grisly stage shocker, alternately amusing and revolting, is far from the author's classic *Sleuth* in terms of quality. For true-crime buffs, there are many references to famous cases.

Among the reprints is F. Lee Bailey's 1978 novel, *Secrets* (Bantam, $2.50), an enthralling and instructive courtroom drama for readers (like me) who could never get enough of Perry Mason . . . Though his life at times seemed like a long-running soap opera, theatrical producer Peter Duluth was one of the best series detectives of the Forties and Fifties. Too long out of print, his cases (as recounted by Patrick Quentin) are now being reissued in paperback, beginning with *Puzzle for Fiends* (1946) and *Puzzle for Pilgrims* (1948) (Avon, $2.25 each) . . . Fred Halliday's *three flamboyant and satirical* novels about tastemaking gourmet Stanley Delphond have been gathered in an omnibus edition, *Murder in the Kitchen* (Pinnacle, $2.50). Only in the first, *The Chocolate Mousse Murders* (1974), does the recipe really work, however, and all three will be too gross for some palates.

© *1979 by Jon L. Breen.*

"Q"

WOMEN'S WILES, Michele Slung, editor, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $9.95.

This year's annual anthology of the Mystery Writers of America includes 19 stories featuring women. Never before have women appeared in such an array of roles: spy, victim, blackmailer, savior, and corpse.

"Stanley Ellin contributes the strongest story, a perceptive and convincing chiller of a woman victimized by a male-dominated society. Stanley Cohen's 'The Ransom of Retta Chiefman' compels chuckles, especially since it ends with a twist that even O. Henry would admire. Edward D. Hoch, Dorothy Collins and Lawrence Treat display good craftsmanship."—*Publishers Weekly*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 541st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a detective debut in the classical tradition . . .

The author, Betty Jochmans, was born in 1924 in Illinois. She started "writing mystery stories at the age of nine, but was sidetracked for 45 years." Her husband is a retired professor, but Mrs. Jochmans teaches part-time at the University of Nebraska and at Nebraska Wesleyan University. The Jochmans have traveled extensively in Europe, Africa, and Central America, and they have "noticed while traveling on trains and planes all over the world that more people read mysteries than anything else." Naturally! . . .

THE GLASS SLIPPER MURDER

by BETTY JOCHMANS

Funny, thought Lieutenant-Detective Alvin V. Baker, how some people look so *right* for their profession or line of work. Eric Moffatt, youngish owner and publisher of the country's most successful line of children's books—Little Folks Fiction, Inc.—was lying on a hay-colored shag rug in front of Baker, looking for all the world like an oversized Little Boy Blue, sound asleep in the barn where he was taking time out from his horn-blowing. Wavy blond hair lay charmingly disheveled across a high broad forehead. Eyes, widely set, were closed, but Baker would have given odds they were blue. The cheeks still had a touch of healthy pink, and a disturbingly sweet smile turned up the corners of the mouth.

The rest of him was a mess. A red-black hole in the middle of the chest still glistened with blood that was just beginning to coagulate. In his left hand Eric was grasping a copy of a Little Folks anthology of fairy tales titled *The Glass Slipper*. The picture on the dust jacket

© *1979 by Betty Jochmans.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a collage of well-known objects from fairy stories—a gleaming glass slipper surrounded by smaller versions of a gingerbread house, a spilled bucket, a frog, and some other objects that Baker decided he was too old to identify.

The fingers of Eric's right hand were curled as though still clutching the ballpoint pen that now lay on the rug, several feet from the body. It looked as though that hand had been stabbing at the picture of the glass slipper on the jacket, trying to draw an X through it with the ballpoint. The last stroke might have been accomplished after death when the lifeless body fell forward over the book. With his last bit of strength, thought Baker, the murdered man had tried to call our attention to the glass slipper.

Moffatt's body had been found just an hour earlier. An early riser, the young publisher was in the habit of coming in to work before the rest of the office staff. His secretary, Miss Hunzel, (who looked, thought Baker, like the Wicked Witch of the North), had found her employer lying face down on the floor. Rolling him over, she had gone into hysterics when she saw the gaping bloody wound in his chest.

Nothing, according to Miss Hunzel, had been stolen. What *was* missing was the murder weapon.

Someone had known that the young publisher would be alone in his office; someone had had access to the building and his office; someone had been able to walk up to him quite naturally . . . After nearly 30 years of investigating murder, Baker still shuddered at the sight of that wound. Death hadn't even been mercifully quick. Moffatt had evidently reeled and fallen from the attack just a few feet from his desk and had just had the time, after his murderer left, to get his hands on the book of fairy tales, grasp the ballpoint, and make that painful, sinister X through the picture of the glass slipper.

Baker replaced the sheet over the body and sat back on his heels. Murder was such a waste . . .

"Seen enough?" Detective-Sergeant Gary Steig swung in through the door and plopped himself down in a blue leather chair, draping one leg over the padded arm. Steig was half of Baker's age.

"Yes, I've seen it all," Baker murmured. "You can let the picture boys in now—and get that book and the ballpoint over to the lab."

The photographers came in to do their grisly ballet of squatting and angling for shots of the body. Baker turned to leave. He didn't want to watch Steig wrest that book of fairy tales from the clutching hand of Little Boy Blue. But he didn't turn quickly enough to miss

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seeing the younger man's plastic-gloved hand make its last tug which freed the book from the dead hand. The hand dropped, like a lump of clay, and bounced on the rug.

Back in his office, Baker gathered together the reports of background information about Eric Moffatt. So far, nothing. Thirty-seven, he looked 21; capable head of a profitable publishing business inherited from his father; married, no children; membership in the usual clubs and charitable societies. It added up to the kind of obituary the newspapers would run if Moffatt had died in his sleep.

Baker looked up to see Steig slouching through his office door. Steig immediately slid into a chair. The man seemed incapable of standing up for even a few seconds. Inevitably he threw a sturdy leg over the arm of the chair.

"Well?" Baker almost added, "Now that you're comfortable."

"I checked out the will, like you said. Guy named Farquahr—funny name, eh?—of Fleetwood and Farquahr, over on—"

"Skip the details."

"Okay, okay. All the personal property goes to the wife—but get this—only *half* of the business. The other half goes to Jack Paine." He paused as if expecting some comment or reaction.

"Do you think you could just spit it out, Steig, and stop acting like a game-show host? Who the hell is Jack Paine?"

Steig shrugged. "Jack Paine is the son of old man Moffatt's former partner, Alistair Paine. He and Moffatt started the business back in the thirties—"

"I said no details."

Steig looked hurt. "Paine sold out to Moffatt during the war, in the mid-forties, when paper was hard to get and business wasn't"—a look from Baker cut him off again—"uh, Paine frittered his money away and Moffatt put the business on a paying basis. Evidently Moffatt had some tender feelings for his old partner, so he fixed up some kind of a trust where if anything happened to him, then Paine's son, Jack, would come into half of the business." Steig unhooked his leg from the chair and leaned forward expectantly.

Baker snapped, "Find Jack Paine. What are you waiting for?"

Steig jumped up and headed back to his own desk. When a colleague caught his eye, he jerked his thumb in the direction of Baker's office and sliced a forefinger across the front of his throat.

Coming through his doorway, Baker caught Steig's act and felt remorse. Very little. He would have to do something about his attitude toward young Steig. Or maybe he should just tie him up and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leave him in the forest for the wild beasts to devour. That's the way they did it in the fairy tales. Fairy tales! His mind kept coming back to them. It was that book with the X-ed glass slipper . . .

Theresa Moffatt looked like a typical young society matron. Her carefully made-up eyes hardly showed signs of tears. "Little Ms. Moffatt," thought Baker. As she crossed her slim legs, Baker blinked—she was wearing glass slippers! On second look he saw they were clear plastic. Glass slippers—he was *seeing* them, too.

But now Theresa Moffatt was introducing him to a distinguished-looking, middle-aged man, who was wearing a soothing look of concerned benevolence for the widow Moffatt. "Along came a spider," thought Baker.

"This is Andrew Vair," she said, as he sat down beside her. At her bidding Vair seemed to come to life when he leaned toward Baker, the action causing his knee to press comfortingly against hers. When he spoke, it was clear that Vair knew how to take command.

"I am—was—Eric Moffatt's general manager at L.F.F.—er, Little Folks Fiction," he explained unnecessarily.

Baker nodded. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Vair. We have a few questions for Mrs. Moffatt, if you'll excuse us." Baker, too, knew how to take command. But Vair made no move to go.

"I'm here at Mrs. Moffatt's request, Lieutenant, as an old friend of both Eric and Theresa." He stopped and turned toward Theresa Moffatt.

It was obvious that there was more than friendship here. "That's right, Lieutenant," she said, eyeing her champion. "Anything you wish to ask me can be asked in Andrew's presence." She dabbed at her nose with a little white handkerchief.

Vair was quick on the uptake. "Actually, Lieutenant, I *insist* on standing by Mrs. Moffatt."

Baker could see that he wouldn't get far questioning her now. So he limited his questions for the present and soon left. Walking to the car, he found himself making up a silly rhyme in his head: "Vair, Vair—always there . . . Vair, where? In my hair. The name Vair made him think of something from his past . . .

In the car he knew Steig was going to say it before he started. "A.V., it's *got* to be Paine. That's what Moffatt was trying to tell us when he X-ed out the glass slipper. Glass-pane—get it? Of course, it's not *spelled* the same, but—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lieutenant Baker jumped in his seat, and Steig almost hit a cross-town bus. "That's it! Good Lord, it's the *spelling!*" Baker was lost in thought for several seconds, then he looked across the seat at Steig and almost laughed. Poor Sergeant Steig, thought Baker. With that superior look on his face—he really thinks he's cracked the case.

A few minutes later Baker entered his office and reached for the phone. At the same time Steig came flying in, clutching a piece of paper and even forgetting to flop into the nearest chair. "Lieutenant, Jack Paine's dead! Drunk-driving accident—two years ago—cracked open his skull when his car went over a cliff."

Baker's puzzled eyes rose slowly to the excited face before him. "Who's dead? Oh, yes, Jack Paine. Well, no matter."

Steig gaped. But Baker was smiling as he said, "Pull yourself together, Sergeant. So Jack fell down and broke his crown, eh? *Très bizarre, très piquant.*" Steig found his voice. "Aw, boss, you know I can't understand German."

"Not German, you klutz," said Baker. "By the way, did you know that I used to live in Quebec when I was a boy? My father was French-Canadian." He paused and his face took on a faraway look. Steig sat waiting. He had found the chair and was now slumped in it.

The daydream ended abruptly. Baker had snapped out of his mental lapse and was barking orders at Steig. " . . . and see to it *now!*" Steig leaped out of his chair and out of the office.

Those who knew Baker, like Chief Inspector Logan, recognized that demon light of discernment in his eyes. Logan knew well the capabilities of this man standing before him. "You can't tell me what supports your theory, Al?"

Baker's mouth was set. "Not now." He knew the limited extent of the Chief's education. Baker's line of reasoning would go over like the little pigs' houses against the huff and puff of the wolf, if he was pushed into explaining it now.

Logan hesitated for only a few moments, then he gave Baker the go-ahead. Nobody—including the Chief—could stand up to Baker when he really started rolling on a case.

By late afternoon Steig and an assistant had finished their legwork. Steig's face changed from triumph to bewilderment as he stood in the Chief's office holding a well-sharpened letter opener. The Chief's narrowed eyes could just make out some brownish streaks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still staining the blade.

"I would never have believed it, Chief! It was stashed in Vair's briefcase!"

The Chief smiled at Steig's youthful enthusiasm and turned to Baker. "Ready to tell us what made you suspect Vair, Lieutenant? You said it was more than a hunch."

"It was the name," Baker said. "Vair. It fitted Moffatt's dying attempt to scratch an X through the glass slipper. It's something I remembered—from my youth and my early acquaintance with the French language. It also has to do with the first written version of fairy tales.

"Wherever the Cinderella story originated, our English version came from an old French translation, and somewhere along the line an interesting distortion occurred." Baker warmed to his explanation. "In the original French version, Cinderella's fairy godmother conjures up all the goodies for her, including little slippers of *fur*. Makes more sense, doesn't it? Now the Old French word for fur is *vair,* v-a-i-r—that's right, just like Andrew Vair's name. But the word *vair,* v-a-i-r was passing out of common use. Another word, one that sounds exactly like v-a-i-r, but which is spelled differently and means something completely different, got substituted for it. That word is *verre,* v-e-r-r-e. And v-e-r-r-e means—"

"Glass!" The Chief and Steig said it in unison.

"Right. And Eric Moffatt, who knew all about the history of the fairy tales he published, wanted to give us a clue to his murderer. He realized he hadn't the time or strength to write V-a-i-r, but he could call our attention to the glass slipper on the jacket of his book—by slashing an X through it, trying to tell us, 'Not *verre*—but *vair*—Andrew Vair!' "

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 542nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a playback . . .

The author, Sharon Johnson, was thirty-seven when she submitted her first story. She is "a wife, mother, homemaker, and part-time postal clerk." Her hobbies include oil painting, reading, and crafts . . .

TWILIGHT

by SHARON JOHNSON

Silence.

But now the blood reverses its flow and begins to reenter his body through every gash and bruise. Splintered bone and torn muscle straighten and tighten. A tooth is re-implanted and a drooping ear is reunited with its root. The skull is restored to its original roundness. When all parts are in their proper place the wounds close. The terrible grinding begins as metal strains to weld. Now the eyes open and the head lifts slowly. The image of the oncoming driver's widened eyes appears and awareness registers. Hands clutch at an unresponding wheel as reinflated tires squeal and two vehicles separate as they came together, at 70 miles per hour. Careening backward down the highway, he makes desperate attempts to apply the brakes, but his feet are powerless. Abruptly the car reverses its hindward plunge and he is thrown against the seat. Wildly he grabs for the wheel and it responds. He is able to decelerate.

Driving carefully now, his clothing wet with perspiration, he wonders what bad dream, what hallucinogen, has him in its power. His rear-view mirror reveals nothing but the receding image of a dark truck or van. The vague feeling that he is standing perfectly still and the road is passing beneath him like some giant conveyer belt persists, although his speedometer says otherwise. Weakly he considers stopping to rest, but the overriding urge to be rid of this place

© *1979 by Sharon Johnson.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keeps him going. He looks for a gas station, for the reassuring presence of other human beings, where he can rest without fear.

Finally a station on the right-hand side of the road appears. He pulls in behind the car filling up. The attendant is finishing the windshield and making conversation with the driver: "Did you see the wreck south of town? You must have passed it coming in. A black van and a red station wagon. Yup, both drivers killed instantly. Didn't know what hit 'em."

Now the attendant is finished. He is putting his rag and cleaner back and going in to make change.

He is walking right through the hood of the red station wagon.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

NURSERY CRIMES

(With apologies to Mother Goose)

by CAROLYN T. CREW

Peter Piper's picking people's pockets.
Times are changing in a lot of ways.
It's very hard to earn a decent living
Picking pickled peppers nowadays.

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief;
Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of beef.
The cops went to Taffy's house and found the bone he'd left.
What with the price of beef today they charged him with grand theft.

© *1979 by Carolyn T. Crew.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 543rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Join Bird Dog in his six-wheeler truck on U.S. 87 just past midnight and listen to the lingo of the CBs as the mystery slowly unfolds . . .

The author, Jack Polk, is an inspiration to all of us. At the age of sixty-six he gives us, as his first fiction in print, a story as contemporary as this morning's news bulletin. Mr. Polk has been an airplane pilot since the 1920s. He was the pilot on the first flight from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, in 1937. He retired in 1958 as a Captain, U.S. Navy, and was Associate Professor of Humanities at the University of Corpus Christi (now Corpus Christi State University) for a number of years.

There is a lot more we can tell you about Jack Polk, but we'll save it, hoping to use it soon to preface his second story. After all, he's a young sixty-six . . .

ON THE CB

by JACK POLK

I slowed when the black rubber strewn along the highway showed up in my headlights. I stopped before I reached a truck about the size of mine stranded on the shoulder. The right-rear wheels were on bare rims. That's a problem with dual rear wheels: if one tire goes flat unnoticed, the other can overheat and literally explode. I saw no one around, so I drove on, fighting sleep with what Mattie calls my "what if's." What if that was a circus truck and the tigers had got loose in the Big Thicket?

There's nothing blacker—or scarier—than the Big Thicket on a cloudy night. The headlights on my six-wheeler truck, pointing down the canyon that U.S. 87 slashes through the towering pines, only intensified the darkness along the sides. Thunder rumbled in

© 1979 by Jack Polk.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the distance. I adjusted the squelch on my CB radio to keep the static down.

I tried to push off the creepy, closed-in feeling I always get along this stretch of road. When I passed through the little town of Village Mills, graveyard-dark and quiet, I looked at the goodbye watch the boys had given me last year. Mattie said it was the best present she ever got. Twenty minutes past midnight. Saturday already. Mattie always worried, but not as much as before I retired. I figured I'd be home before long. As my eyes distance-focused again, a glimmer of white materialized in my headlights far down the highway.

I mashed my dimmer switch and slowed down. Maybe imaginary tigers or even a ghost can't hurt you, but a cow on the highway is nothing to argue with. As I drew closer, my side beam lighted up a woman in a long white dress.

I pulled to a stop a few feet short of where she stood waving me down. Out of habit I checked the odometer mileage even before I noted how the dress hugged her figure. She walked in the lights toward the truck, her blonde hair somewhat askew. She carried a huge brocaded handbag that bulged and sagged. I noticed a dark splotch near the hemline of her dress. She had on one white shoe and one dark one.

She opened the door and climbed into the cab before I could say anything. She smelled of gasoline. I rolled down my side window, and the gas smell became stronger.

"These shoes are ruined," she said. Then she added crossly, "You're late."

She was right. It had taken me longer than I had expected to get rid of my load of produce in Dallas and to pick up the stuff I needed. I shifted gears and started off.

"Where are you going?" she snapped. "That pig's still over there. You've got to—"

I turned toward her. She was staring at me in the dim light of the instrument panel. She wasn't as young as I had thought, but she wore a good paint job.

"Who are you?" she asked hoarsely. "Why are you in this truck?"

"Name's Thompson, ma'am, and it's my truck." I pushed the accelerator down. The engine coughed and then smoothed into a whine. I shifted through second into high. "What is it I got to do?"

"Let me out!"

We were rolling along pretty good. Sheet lightning shot a silvery glow through the dark sky in front of us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A lady got no business out in the thicket on a night like this, ma'am," I said slowly. "I'll take you where you can make a phone call or do whatever you need to do."

"Maybe you didn't hear me, old man," she said, her voice rising. "Stop this thing!"

I cut my eyes toward her. She had her right hand inside that big brocaded bag. It seemed to point in my direction. Just as I took my foot off the accelerator, the CB blared out.

"Hey, there, Southbounder," the speaker said. "This is Arkansas Traveler, getting kind of lonesome. Got your ears on?"

The woman jerked. "What's that?"

"Citizens band radio." I pointed down the highway to twin points of light in the distance. "That fella comin' toward us is calling me."

I took the microphone out of its holder and pressed the transmit button carefully. If I jam it all the way down, it sticks. I got to get me a new mike one of these days.

"Arkansas Traveler, you got Bird Dog," I said. "Bring it on."

I pulled on the transmit button to make sure it had released and laid the microphone across my lap. We continued to slow down.

"Mighty fine, Bird Dog," the speaker said. "You got rain ahead on the twin slabs. How's it look over your shoulder?"

I pushed the microphone button gingerly. "Clean and green and dry all the way to Jacksonville, Arkansas Traveler, but mighty black to Woodville. Watch out for a six-wheeler with blown tires about five miles north of Village Mills. No lights showing."

"Six-wheeler? A truck?" the woman said. "Damn that Vern!" She slumped back in the seat.

"That's a big ten four, Bird Dog," Arkansas Traveler said. "Some state smokies and a county mounty around Kountze. Keep your eyes peeled and your foot light on double nickels."

"What's he saying?" the woman asked.

The Arkansas Traveler's lights were coming up fast. I pulled over on the shoulder and rode the brakes.

"What are you doing?"

"Stopping, ma'am. Like you said."

"You can't stop now!"

I shrugged. "Whatever you say, lady." I romped on the accelerator and twisted back on the pavement.

"Got problems, Bird Dog?" the speaker blared.

"Nothing I can't handle, Arkansas Traveler," I said. "I think."

We had not reached my usual cruising speed of 55—double nick-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

els—when Arkansas Traveler roared past—a big eighteen-wheeler, the top outlined in amber running lights.

"I'm on my way to old Tyler town, Bird Dog. Have a good night tonight and a better day tomorrow. This is Arkansas Traveler, standing by on nineteen. I'm gone."

"Where did you say you were going?" the woman asked.

I hesitated. "Kountze is the next town. A few miles to Beaumont from there. Then Interstate Ten clear to Houston."

The red lights of Arkansas Traveler receded in my rear-view mirror. I glanced toward the woman. She was watching the mirror on her side.

I pushed my glasses farther up on my nose and turned my attention to the road. Night driving bothers me. My eyes just aren't as good as they used to be, particularly my "peripheral vision," as old Doc Trumbull called it when he examined my eyes last year. "As we get older, Charley," he said, "we begin to lose our side vision. Then our foresight. But we never lose our hindsight." His fat belly shook with laughter, and he charged me $25.

"Whooee!" Arkansas Traveler's voice broke in. "What we got here?"

"Don't answer him," the woman said.

I shrugged. "He didn't call me."

We drove on. The lightning flickered continually ahead of us, and static began to hiss again on the CB. Drops of rain speckled the windshield. As the highway widened into four lanes, I felt the first gusts of wind shake the truck.

"Gawdamighty!" Arkansas Traveler's voice was high-pitched and shaky. "Bird Dog, you still there? We gotta get the smokies—quick! I'm gone to the emergency channel."

"Shut that thing off," the woman said slowly and ominously.

I turned my head. She was facing me, her hand buried deep in the handbag. I could see the whites of her eyes. My gut felt queasy, and my legs tingled like they used to when someone pointed a gun at me. I wasn't tired any more.

"Take it easy, lady," I said soothingly. When I placed the microphone back in its holder on the dash, I jammed the transmit button down hard. I turned the channel selector to 9. The only sound was the roar of the engine, the rush of the wind by the open window, and the hiss of the tires on the pavement.

"That's better, old man," the woman said. "What did he mean, smokies?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"State highway patrol," I said loudly. "Sounded like he found something back there—about where I picked you up."

"You say you're going to Houston?"

"Could be, lady—if I don't get too sleepy." I looked at my watch again. I peered hard down the highway. There was practically no traffic this time of night, but the Department of Public Safety boys sometimes made a pass up this stretch of the thicket fairly early in the midwatch. It is a bad place for a motorist to get stranded.

"Stop calling me 'lady,' " she said petulantly.

"Okay, Delilah."

She sniffed. "Delilah?"

"Had to be Delilah," I said slowly. "I figure you to be the kootch dancer with that carnival I saw in Beaumont—the one that uses a big snake in her act."

"You're crazy," she said. She straightened decisively. "I'll go on to Houston with you."

I rolled up the window to cut down the noise. "You'll have to talk louder, Delilah. My old ear ain't so good. What were you doing out there at this time of night?"

"My car broke down."

"I didn't see any car."

"I had to get it off the highway, didn't I?"

I thought I could detect a reflection of headlights on the clouds in front of us. "Did you leave Samson back there, Delilah?"

"Very funny."

The headlights came into view. "The driver of that eighteen-wheeler figgered it was funny enough to want the state police to help him laugh."

"Just keep driving, old man," she said shortly.

"Oh, I will—if I don't go to sleep. I figger you got that snake in that big handbag, Delilah, and old Bird Dog ain't about to argue with a snake."

"Now you're getting smart, Bird Dog."

The headlights were too low and too close together to be a truck.

"Know what else I figger, Delilah? You were with Olga and her trained bear act in a pickup camper on your way to the next carnival stop. You thought my truck was the carnival truck, didn't you?"

"Shut up!" she said viciously. "Why is that car slowing down?"

"If that's a state-highway patrol car, he wouldn't bother old Bird Dog," I said slowly and distinctly. "He would go on up the highway"— I looked at the odometer—"about six miles."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The car flashed past us, picking up speed. I thought I caught a glimpse of a dome on the top.

Delilah jerked around. "Was that a police car?"

I let the front wheels wander off to the edge of the road. There was a wrenching jerk as one of the double rear wheels went off the pavement.

"What are you doing, old man?" Delilah shouted.

"Guess I nearly went to sleep," I mumbled. Then I spoke up loud and clear. "If I'm going to drive you to Houston tonight, I got to have some coffee."

"You got a Thermos?"

"Nope," I lied. "Bet you could use a cup of coffee, too."

"Shut up!" Delilah snapped. She hunched back in the seat. "Where could you get coffee?"

"In the next town. Roy's Barbecue Stand."

"Curb service?"

"I'll have to go inside."

She was quiet for a while.

"No tricks?" she asked.

"With you holding a snake on me? I ain't no fool."

"I'd better go in with you."

"You don't have to. Roy's got big glass windows in his place. You can watch every move I make."

Hard rain suddenly drummed down. I turned on the windshield wipers. Delilah and I were suspended in a dark, noisy little cocoon, with the flow of our headlights against the downpour our only connection to the outside world. I slowed down.

"Here's what we'll do," I said, being careful to enunciate each word. "I'll park outside Roy's. You squinch down in the seat. I'll go inside, drink a cup of coffee, and order one to go for the road. You stay real still, ma'am, and nobody can see that you're in the truck."

"You are mighty cooperative, old man. Why?"

I thought a minute. "I reckon I just want to get you where you gotta go with the least fuss and bother. Then I can tend to my own business."

"What is your business?"

"Me and my wife got a little piece of land. We got beans, peas, tomatoes, and sweet corn right now. Watermelons and cantaloupes later on."

The woman laughed. "A farmer! And I was worried. Okay, Bird Dog, you can get the coffee."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rain had slackened some by the time we reached Kountze. I pulled under Roy's big red sign and parked parallel to the highway. There were no other customers. I opened my door. Reaching out, I twisted the rear-view mirror outward as far as it would go.

Delilah scrambled across the seat and grabbed my arm hard. "What are you doing?" she snarled.

"You want to be able to see me, don't you?" I said patiently. "In this rain, any headlights coming from behind would reflect right in your eyes."

Her grip slowly relaxed. Then she laughed. "You're something else, farmer."

"Yep." I got out, pulling my collar up to keep the rain from going down my neck. I walked around the truck and twisted the right-hand mirror. She didn't say a thing.

The air conditioner hummed noisily inside Roy's Barbecue Stand. I felt its chill through my damp clothes. I blinked in the bright fluorescent lights. Otis Johnson, the night counterman, just looked at me, his lined face impassive. I picked a stool near the middle of the counter and sat down, my back to the highway. Otis got up, filled a mug at the coffee machine, and set it in front of me without a word. Old friends don't have to talk much.

I sipped the hot black coffee. Mattie would be waiting in the living room at home, all the lights on, wondering why in tarnation I was so late. If all went well, I might be home in a few minutes. If not—

I was still dawdling my way through the coffee, staring down into the half-empty mug, when I thought I heard a noise outside followed by a muffled scream. I waited a while before I looked up to where Otis sat hunched on his stool back of the counter. His hair was nearly as gray as my own. Otis was watching me from under drooping eyelids.

"My wife says things like that ain't none of my business now," I explained apologetically.

Otis nodded.

The dregs in the bottom of my mug had been stone-cold for a long time when I heard the door finally open. Otis slid off his stool and went to the coffee machine. I turned slowly around. A man clad in a glistening yellow slicker stood in the door, water dripping from the wide brim of his state-highway patrolman's hat. He came inside and closed the door.

"No coffee for me, Otis," he said, taking off his hat and shaking it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This one's for me, Mr. Cook," Otis said.

The patrolman turned in my direction. "Sheriff—"

"Not any more, son," I said, shaking my head. "I'm retired—and Mrs. Thompson's bound and determined to keep it that way." I peered at him closely. "You Ab Cook's boy?"

He nodded. "Jim."

"Well, Jim?"

He sat on a stool and laid his hat on the counter. "When you were sheriff, your policy was to do things peaceably—if possible. Right?"

"Fewer people get hurt that way."

"The night deputy and I worked it your way. He eased up from the back on one side, and I came on the other. We snatched the door open and had handcuffs on her before she knew what was happening."

"I wish I didn't know," I said. "Where is she now?"

"In the sheriff's office—cussing you and somebody named Vern. You know what was in that bag of hers?"

"A snake, Jim. A great big snake."

Jim Cook just looked at me. Otis put his coffee down and moved closer.

"Delilah used it in her act," I said. "She's the kootchy dancer with a little carnival sideshow. What about the eighteen-wheeler?"

"One of our officers is at the scene. I've just had a long session on the radio with him."

I shook my head slowly. "Old Arkansas Traveler really got excited about them bears, didn't he?"

"What bears?" Otis said, his eyes wide.

"Three of 'em," I said. "Prancing on their hind legs around a stalled pickup camper."

"I knowed they's supposed to be bears in Big Thicket," Otis said, "but I ain't never seen none."

"These are trained bears from Olga's carnival act. She let them out of the camper to get some air."

Jim Cook continued to stare at me. "There was gasoline—"

"Oh, yeah," I said. "I figger Delilah and Olga had been trying to get the camper engine started. They got it to flooding and leaking gas. Olga thought maybe it needed oil and spilled some on Delilah's dress and shoe. Delilah got mad and crossed the highway to flag down the carnival truck that was coming back for another load of gear. But I came along instead."

Jim got up, put on his hat, and walked over to the door. He turned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around, his hand on the knob. "I remember when you helped us get CB radios for our patrol cars, Mr. Thompson."

"We had 'em in the county cars. I figgered you boys needed CB."

"Sure." He hesitated. "There is one thing, though. The Arkansas Traveler said he ought to report you to the Federal Communications Commission for tying up the emergency channel."

"My mike musta got stuck accidentally."

Jim grinned. "Sure it did. Good thing, too. You could have been wrong, you know."

I could have been. But I wasn't.

"Samson was middle-aged," I said slowly. "Medium height. Partly bald, and maybe a little overweight. Wearing glasses, probably."

"Samson?" Jim reached inside his slicker, took out a little black notebook, and glanced through it. He gave me a questioning look.

"That's the kind of guy I figger would fall for a fancy woman like Delilah—run off with her, even," I said. "I reckon she had different ideas. How many bullet holes?"

"Two," Jim said, putting his notebook away. "How did you know?"

"Oil ain't red, Jim. Besides, that handbag didn't go with an evening dress. And there was Delilah herself."

"Apparently she pulled the body clear," Jim said. "Then she siphoned gas and soaked down the car. Why?"

"Probably planned to torch it as soon as her boy friend arrived and loaded up Samson's body," I said, studying the dregs in my mug. "That would be Vern, I reckon. Once they dumped poor old Samson in a swamp somewhere, they would have been free and clear."

Jim nodded. "And Samson, as you call him, wouldn't have been missed until Monday. Then everybody would think he had skipped out." He opened the door and paused. "You know what was really in Delilah's handbag?"

"Besides the snake? Money."

"Still in wrappers. Samson, or whoever he was, must have been pretty high up in a bank to get to that much. Too bad we didn't get Delilah's boy friend, too."

"He can't have got far," I said. "He left his truck on the highway shoulder about five miles above Village Mills."

Jim's eyebrows went up. "I'll get to work on it. Give Mrs. Thompson my regards."

"How can I?" I growled. "I haven't seen you."

"Don't look at me," Otis said. "I ain't seen neither one of you. I ain't hear nothin', either."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Whatever makes you happy," Jim said, grinning. He went out into the rain, closing the door behind him.

I wasn't happy. I got up to leave and paid Otis for the coffee. His mouth spread into a smile, showing natural teeth that were a lot whiter than those contraptions Doc Turentine had built for me.

"I'd druther sit next to a gun than a snake," Otis said.

I didn't worry about Otis talking. He never gets involved in things that don't concern him. In twenty-twenty hindsight, I could see it's a policy I'm going to have to work on.

"Q"

CAT'S-PAW

by MARJORIE Q. BOYLE

A lost pussy cat who was fondly called Mitten
Had lived at a bank since she was a kitten.
She had captured the hearts of all of the staff
And evoked from even the grimmest a laugh.
The employees in chorus cried, "Oh, what a pity!
"We all ought to adopt this poor little kitty."
The food they fed Mitten was fit for a queen,
And her coat soon acquired a satiny sheen.
When gaily bedecked in her ruby red ascot
In all the wide world there was no prouder mascot.
When the bank closed each day she never took flight
Since she catnaped by day and was watchcat by night.
On a night that was murky, moonless, and dank
A reckless young robber broke into the bank.
He opened the vault with infinite stealth
And greedily feasted his eyes on its wealth.
Aware that there wasn't a moment to waste
Mitten took off in padded-paw haste.
Her coat which was black save for one paw of white
Blended subtly into the dark of the night.
With one fluffy white paw and with plenty of charm
She gracefully touched off the burglar alarm.

1979 by Marjorie Q. Boyle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

D. O. Bell's first story, "Trial and Error," appeared in the November 1978 issue of EQMM. His second story, as usually happens to new writers of mysteries, is altogether different—a fresh and modern variation of a traditional 'tec theme . . .

SAFE AND FREE

by D. O. BELL

The idea of murdering his partner had never risen above fantasy in Adams' mind. But it was a recurring fantasy. He spent an unhealthy amount of time visualizing Baker falling victim to "the perfect murder." And when the local radio reported the names of accident fatalities, Adams tuned his ear, hoping to hear the name Joseph Baker. That name, however, was never listed among the dead, and Adams' desire to see it in the obituary column intensified.

Adams' growing obsession with Baker's demise was not rooted in personal animosity; it was purely a business ambition, a veritable necessity of business. Splitting up the partnership or leaving the business would not suffice.

The A & B Air Transport Service had been Baker's idea. He had the plane and some capital and a few business connections. Adams was the other necessary ingredient—he was an experienced pilot who wanted to fly. Adams had instantly grabbed at the proposal and wasted no time borrowing the $10,000 necessary to buy in.

Besides, he needed the work. His reputation as a daredevil, an audacious flyer who too often acted on impulse, had prevented him from getting a commercial flying job on his general discharge from the Air Force. He saw the new business as sure-fire, figuring he would be comfortably well-off in five years.

Five years had passed, and despite long work weeks he was still paying off the original loan. The only variable he had failed to figure

© *1979 by D. O. Bell.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on was the fact that Baker was an easy touch. Baker handled the business end efficiently enough but like a patsy. Anybody with a well-phrased request (and almost everybody had one) could get the rates reduced, sometimes even to below cost. The lack of a large income did not disturb Baker whose needs and pleasures were simple and inexpensive. He was a nature lover and lived alone in the country. Adams starkly felt the meager income. His extravagant tastes steadily pushed him further and further into debt.

On the several occasions when Adams confronted Baker with the income problem, Baker replied, "I'm not in business to rip people off, and I won't. If you want out, I'll buy you out." But the return of the $10,000 investment would leave Adams with nothing but five wasted years. It was all Adams could do to restrain his rage at this reply to his complaint.

As Adams began to feel trapped by his predicament, he soon began daydreaming of Baker's death or disappearance. It all started one evening when Adams reread the partnership agreement. He was looking for a way to assume more control of the financial side. It was Baker who had had the agreement drafted originally, and Adams had scarcely considered the terms at the time he signed. Now they were to become as familiar to him as flight instructions.

One unusual aspect of the agreement was the provision that on the death of one partner, the other (rather than the heirs of the deceased) would inherit the deceased's share and thus become full owner of the business. There was another unusual provision: included in the definition of death was "disappearance for more than twenty days." Baker had explained: "Planes crash over rough terrain, and sometimes the passengers and crew are never found. This will resolve any question of that nature."

The partners had also taken out a life insurance policy on each other in the amount of $100,000. The agent writing the insurance had agreed to write in the 20-day disappearance provision.

Adams never felt that he had *planned* Baker's murder. The plan just came to him, and he was helpless to resist implementing it.

One afternoon in early winter Adams had just returned from a short flight. He got back to the office and found a note from Baker saying that he was downtown shopping for some camping equipment and would be back soon. Adams shook his head, wondering how many customer calls had been missed while Baker was out. Adams' irritation was interrupted by the ringing of the phone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A and B Air Transport," he said.

"Yes, I need to ship some cargo."

"All right. Where to?"

"Bainbridge," the customer said.

"Bainbridge," Adams repeated, tracking the map on the wall. "Let's see, Bainbridge is way up in the northeast corner of the state."

"That's right."

"That's mountainous country up there with pretty bad weather this time of year."

"Can you do it or not?" The voice was not without impatience.

"Sure, we can do it."

"What's your price?"

"To Bainbridge, eight hundred dollars," Adams ventured. Maybe he could avoid telling Baker about this job.

"All right," the customer said, so easily that Adams wished he had overcharged even more. "But the cargo has to be picked up tomorrow and delivered tomorrow to Bainbridge."

"Tomorrow's Saturday," Adams said, seizing the opportunity. "I'll have to pay my pilot overtime. That'll run another two hundred."

There was a pause during which Adams feared he had gone too far. Then the voice said in a sighing tone of resignation, "Oh, all right."

"Fine," Adams said, pleased with himself. "Give me the details."

Baker soon returned to the small storefront office. He was laden with new camping gear and appeared to have not a care in the world.

"Trip go all right?" he asked Adams.

"Fine," Adams said. "If only we'd made some money on it."

"We made a fee on it."

"Slave wages."

"It was all they could afford," Baker said. "It was that or keep the plane on the ground for the day. We didn't have any other orders."

Adams bit back a sarcastic retort about Baker's absence from the office. He also remained silent about the Bainbridge order.

"Well," Baker said, surveying his new gear, "I'm going to take a couple of days off and go camping. I'm going hiking in the mountains. I love it up there this time of year."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow. Is the plane ready for flight?"

"You're going to fly?" Adams failed to disguise either surprise or annoyance.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If my license hasn't expired," Baker said.

Adams saw that he could no longer conceal the Bainbridge trip, so he told Baker he'd be flying over the mountains tomorrow.

"Great," Baker said. "You can just drop me off."

"I'll be glad to," Adams said.

He thought about it that night until he fell asleep.

Early Saturday morning Adams drove the A & B van out to the Lennox Funeral Home. He was met there by the junior Lennox who was in his mid-forties. "Pull your van right around here," he told Adams, pointing to double doors at the side.

Adams backed the van up to the doors, got out, and went inside to Lennox's office.

"You'll be met at the Bainbridge Airport," Lennox said in a practised low tone. "These are the people who'll be meeting you." He handed Adams a note. "And here's your fee." He handed Adams a check for $1000.

"Thank you," Adams said, carefully folding the check. "Happy to be of service." Adams stood to go, then paused. "Not that it matters," he said, "but I'm just curious about the person who'll be riding along with me."

"A Mrs. Horton," Lennox said without inflection. "She went into the hospital for some routine surgery and died on the operating table. We had her funeral service here, but her family's from Bainbridge. They wanted her buried there, so we made the arrangements. The Bainbridge Funeral Home people will pick up the casket from you, take it straight to the cemetery, and bury it."

"Okay," Adams said. He turned to go, but Lennox was not quite finished.

"If I were the woman's husband, I'd be suing," Lennox said with sudden anger in his voice. "I may be in the funeral business, but I don't want them until they're due. I've been dealing with dead people long enough to know this woman shouldn't have died. It's none of my business, but I'd be suing."

Adams saw that Lennox was finally through, so he turned to the door and left.

Baker met Adams at the plane. Though Baker was rather small and slight, the two of them had little trouble loading the somewhat large casket into the plane. Baker remarked about the odd cargo, then began putting his camping equipment on board as Adams checked out the plane. Inside, Adams tested all the instruments, then felt beneath his seat for his pistol. He'd had it since his Air

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Force days and out of habit had kept it there for security.

He clicked it to be sure it was still loaded. Holding the pistol beneath the seat, he looked around at the casket in the back and at Baker wrestling with his gear. Blood rushed to Adams' head so fast he thought for a moment he might faint.

"A few miles this side of Bainbridge there's an airstrip," Baker said when they were airborne. "A paper company once used it and it's still in good shape according to my source up there. It's used now mostly by campers. You can let me off there and I'll enter the woods at that spot."

"All right," Adams said without looking away from the instrument panel. He wiped a palm on his shirt and hoped Baker didn't notice how profusely he was perspiring.

They flew in silence most of the way. Baker made an occasional remark about how much he was looking forward to his weekend of camping.

The airstrip came into view, and Baker said, "There it is."

"I'll survey it first," Adams said, putting the plane into descent. He flew low over the strip and then up again.

"It looks fine to me," Baker said.

"Yeah. Did you see anybody else around?"

"No, it looks deserted."

Adams circled and headed back toward the strip. He suddenly had that feeling of terror mixed with ecstasy that he used to get when zeroing in on a bombing target. He set the plane down on the abandoned runway as Baker gathered his belongings. The plane slowed and stopped. Adams gripped the controls to keep his hands from shaking.

Adams' hand shot beneath the seat and fingered the pistol. He knew it was now or never. The rush to his head came again. At last he spoke, finding his voice surprisingly strong and calm. "Baker," he said, "I'm sorry to have to do this. It has nothing to do with you personally, but I've lived in need of money too long. And I'll probably never get another perfect chance."

Baker's face showed an expression of confusion as Adams pulled up the pistol and shot him twice in the heart.

Adams set feverishly to work as though he had but a few minutes to complete the task or be discovered. He opened the casket and removed the corpse of Mrs. Horton. Then he took out the cushions from the bottom of the casket and placed Baker's body inside. He cleaned up all the blood, working with the efficiency of a fine ma-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chine, and squeezed the bloody garments next to Baker's body.

After replacing the cushions, he put back Mrs. Horton's body. She now fitted too high, so he removed the body again and frantically tore away the inside of the cushioning. This time she fitted better. With the cushion cover in place, a casual glance would not raise any suspicion. Adams shut the casket lid and returned to the pilot's seat.

He sped down the runway and took off. Moments later he made radio contact with the Bainbridge Airport.

Everything went as planned. The funeral-home people were there waiting. As they loaded the casket into their hearse, they made some comments about wanting to hurry and get the body buried so they could get home in time for the football kickoff on television.

Flying back, Adams decided to drop Baker's camping gear over the mountains, then realized that would look anything but authentic. He would fly somewhere out of the way and bury it or incinerate it.

Adams was seized by panic that somehow he would be found out and would spend the rest of his life in prison. He did not sleep at all Saturday night. He chain-smoked and drank a fifth of whiskey. Sunday he dozed off and on in his drunkenness and awoke from nightmares of Baker and two policemen coming to take him away. Another nightmare which brought him awake cold and sweating was of Mrs. Horton picking him out of a police lineup.

Sunday night was also sleepless until almost time to get up Monday morning. He had a trip to make to another state, so he busied himself with that. Up in the air he felt safe and free. He was alone and protected by his aloneness. No one could get to him when he was in the air. On the ground he was on the edge of panic. He was like the bomb dismantlers he had known in the war: dismantling a live bomb, their hands were steady and sure; later on in the bar their hands shook so badly they couldn't light a cigarette.

By the time Adams was finished Monday afternoon, it was too late to fly back. He checked into a local motel and went to the nearest bar. He got drunk again, tried to pick up the barmaid, and was finally escorted to the door by the bouncer.

On Tuesday, Adams felt certain that when he got home the authorities would be waiting on his doorstep. His heart beat faster as he approached the runway. But after he arrived, he saw that no one was treating him any differently from the way they always did. Everything on the ground was normal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adams went to the office Wednesday morning and realized he had better notify someone of Baker's disappearance. It scared him to do it, but he knew it was the sensible thing to do. He called the forest ranger station in the northeast, informed them where Baker had entered the woods, and that he had not returned on schedule. Adams was told there had been a new snow, so tracking would not be easy, but they would look into it and keep him posted.

Adams' panic was renewed when someone from the police called him to ask some routine questions. He told the police the same story he had told the forest ranger. Adams' fears were allayed when the police called back a few days later to say they had checked out his story and found it to be true, but they couldn't know if any foul play was involved until they located the body.

Adams thanked them for calling and asked them to let him know if there was any news.

After a few weeks Adams began to quit worrying that he would be found out. Winter had come to the mountains in earnest, preventing further searching, and by spring all suspicions would have grown dim.

Adams made the claim for the insurance and was promptly paid the $100,000 in accordance with the terms. He hired a receptionist at minimum wages to take orders for him. He more than doubled Baker's prices, but orders did not diminish. The business was finally doing what it should have been doing all along.

But Adams was still haunted. Not by a fear or dread of being caught, but by a guilt of having actually killed someone. He lay awake at night unable to exorcise the ghost of Baker. The guilt grew so great at times he resolved that in the morning he would seek out a priest and confess or go directly to the police. But by morning he had collected his wits again and told himself that he had pulled off the perfect murder—and for good reason—and there was no cause to ruin it now.

Other times Adams thought about the murder in the context of his war experiences. He had dropped bombs on who-knows-how-many people. He had felt momentary guilt at that, but that too was justified, and he had got over it. Survival of the fittest, right? Baker was just another of his bombing victims. They were all justifiable homicides. There was no reason to feel guilty.

And in time the guilt did subside, just as the fear of being caught had. Adams began to sleep—and sleep without nightmares. He ate well; he drank less. He felt better than he had in years.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Adams Air Transport Service flourished. In fact, it became the most prosperous business in town. By summer Adams had purchased another plane and hired another pilot. He still flew himself because it gave him his only true freedom. In the fall Adams was elected President of the local Chamber of Commerce. With the passing of time and all his newfound respectability, Adams had all but forgotten that he had murdered his partner. Every successful business has something to hide, he reasoned. His secret was in the category of war memories and other unpleasant memories, suppressed in a seldom visited corner of his mind.

Of course, he couldn't avoid it completely. An unexpected reminder hit him occasionally, such as when someone asked about Baker. But even then he was growing accustomed to passing it off easily.

One morning Adams came into the office to check on the new orders.

"We have two," the receptionist said. "One to Sutton, and one to Bainbridge."

Adams felt the sudden rush of fear hit him like a sharp wind. He paused momentarily to regain control. It had been nearly a year since Baker's death, and this was the first order for Bainbridge since then. No cause for alarm, Adams assured himself. He must not balk at an order to go to Bainbridge. He must adjust to the name Bainbridge as he had to Baker.

"Okay," he said, "fine." He was going to meet it head-on but at the last moment he choked. "I'll take Sutton. Howard, you can have the Bainbridge trip."

"Okay," Howard said.

Late that afternoon Adams was back in the office before Howard returned. Adams looked over the orders for the month. It was his best month yet. He felt proud of himself for building the business so well and so fast. Finally, he felt, he had overcome the unfortunate Baker trouble. Now he was where he wanted to be—and without any nagging guilt.

Howard soon came in. He was a young pilot but good and dependable, a real asset to the company.

"How was the trip?" Adams asked.

"You won't believe it," Howard said.

"Why not? Rough weather?"

"No, the weather was fine. It was the cargo."

"What did you take up there?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I didn't take anything up there. But you won't believe what I brought back. I'm going to fumigate the plane the first thing in the morning. It was all I could do to keep from gagging."

"What do you mean?" There was urgency in Adams' voice.

"Some lady died about a year ago. Now they're suing her doctor for malpractice. They got a court order for a new autopsy, so her body had to be exhumed and brought back here. I just delivered it to the hospital. I've never in my life smelled anything so rank. I may be sick yet."

But it was Adams who was pale and faint.

NEXT MONTH...

Special 39th Anniversary Issue

11 **NEW** stories — including

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH (about things going badly)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Interpol)

RUTH RENDELL (about the paintbox houses)

GEOFFREY BUSH (about the Butlers Club)

PATRICIA MOYES (about the most hated man in London)

and two distinguished reprints by

WHIT MASTERSON

NORMAN MAILER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

Once again we journey back to the life and times of A. J. Raffles, amateur cricketer, professional cracksman, and sophisticated man-about-town, and his chronicler-in-crime, Bunny Manders. The year in this affair is 1907, and the first decade of the twentieth century is depicted in loving and living detail, as exactly as if the story had been written seventy years ago. For example, Raffles rides in a 1907 Darracq landaulette, and through Barry Perowne's eyes you can almost see that early motor-car.

Now, a strange point has just occurred to us. A story about Sherlock Holmes in love is almost unthinkable. But Holmes's criminal counterpart, the handsome, charming, debonair Raffles, one of the most eligible bachelors of his time—why not? Why not indeed . . .

RAFFLES IN LOVE

by BARRY PEROWNE

Elated by a win at poker, I dropped in at the Café Royal to treat myself to a champagne supper. Though it was almost one o'clock, I found the fashionable after-theatre resort more than usually crowded.

Taken aback by the din and dazzle of the spacious dining-room, I paused between the curtains of crimson velvet that draped the lofty doorway, where the head waiter, who knew me, greeted me with a look of concern.

"Why, Mr. Manders," he said, "are you unaware that Signora Luisa Tetrazzini, the great soprano, made her long-awaited London debut tonight? She sang the Violetta role in Signor Verdi's *La Tra-*

© 1979 by Philip Atkey.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

viata so brilliantly, I'm told, that she had endless curtain calls. In consequence, all the socially-important people who've come on here, for supper after the opera, are exceptionally late—and, as you see, I'm afraid I've no table to offer you. However," he added, with a hint of hesitation, "your friend Mr. A. J. Raffles is here."

"Then there's no problem," I said. "Mr. Raffles will naturally wish me to join him."

"With respect, Mr. Manders, are you quite sure he will?" demurred the head waiter, and with a cryptic glance he directed my attention to a table adjacent to one of the huge, gilt-framed wall-mirrors that, on the far side of the dining-room, reflected the crystal glitter of the chandeliers and the animation of the throng.

I at once understood the head waiter's doubt. For Raffles was not alone. His evening-dress immaculate, his dark hair crisp, his keen face tanned, he was *tête-à-tête* with a lady unknown to me.

In our sports-mad country, the captaincy of its representative cricket team, the England XI, involved so many social duties that only some gentleman of independent means who played cricket with skill, from pure love of the game and not for payment, was ever considered suitable for the coveted appointment.

Currently, it was held by A. J. Raffles, who as a result was very well-known, was elected to all the best clubs, was received in the best society—and inevitably, as an agreeable bachelor, was acquainted with many beautiful women.

I often saw him, about town or at the racecourses or at Lord's Cricket Ground, escorting some notable beauty. But his present supper companion, with her raven hair, perfect profile, and necklace of lustrous rubies, seemed especially to his taste. They were the best-matched couple in the Café Royal dining-room. Smiling warmly into each other's eyes, they tinkled their champagne glasses together in what was evidently a toast of mutual esteem.

Where women were concerned, Raffles and I respected each other's right to privacy. To intrude, if one of us happened to see the other in feminine company, was not a thing we did.

"On second thoughts," I said to the head waiter, "I shall not be joining Mr. Raffles at table. I shall sup elsewhere."

Bowing his approval of my tact, the head waiter left me. And, myself about to turn and go, I cast a last glance in the direction of Raffles' table—with the result that, by sheer chance, I saw something that startled me.

I saw, in that big wall-mirror adjacent to Raffles' table, that he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the lady with him were being watched.

I drew back into partial concealment by the *portière* curtains and, round the edge of their crimson velvet, had a sharper look across the dining-room at that mirror. It reflected Raffles' table and several others, including one at which a man sitting alone, his back to Raffles' table, was smoking a cigar. He was also, it seemed to me, keeping on Raffles' table, as reflected in the mirror, an intent scrutiny.

Ramrod-backed in evening-dress, he was of military appearance, ruddy of face, a hint of grey in his close-clipped moustache and in the black hair brushed back thickly over his ears. His eyes were a piercing blue. He took from his pocket a notebook and a gold pencil. He jotted down something, pocketed the notebook, took up his coffee-cup and, over its rim, resumed by way of the mirror his unmistakable surveillance of Raffles' table.

I withdrew to the red-carpeted, chandelier-bright foyer. My heart thumped, my mind raced. What to do? Raffles' "independent means" were in fact dependent on ventures, when opportunity offered, into crime. In such ventures I was his confederate, and the only other person who knew of them—*as far as we were aware*—was Raffles' friend and highly skilful "fence," Ivor Kern. But now Raffles, in the company of a lady with rubies, was under surveillance. The implications made my blood freeze.

I had to find out who the watcher was.

I reclaimed my topper from the cloakroom. Outside the Café Royal a four-wheeler cab had just dropped a fare. I told the cabbie to drive me fifty yards or so up Regent Street, then wait for my further instructions.

This he did. The streetlamps, brightly gaslit, shone in the clear night, but the interior of the cab was dark. I lowered the window on its strap and kept a sharp eye on the Café Royal. Cabs came to it and went from it. After ten long minutes or thereabouts, I saw Raffles come out, the lady with him. Ignoring a waiting hansom hopeful of hire, they strolled away arm-in-arm toward nearby Piccadilly Circus. Almost at once, the man who worried me emerged from the Café Royal.

Tall, tophatted, he stood lighting a fresh cigar as he watched the receding figures of Raffles and the lady. Then he got into the hansom, which set off in my direction, jingled past my stationary cab, and continued north up Regent Street. I told my cabbie to keep the hansom in sight.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm acting," I said, to explain my request, "on behalf of a lady."

"Good on yer, guv'," said the cabbie.

There was little traffic in the streets as the hansom led us, by way of Bloomsbury, into respectable Southampton Row. Here the hansom turned to the right, into a narrow opening. Fortunately, my cabbie had his wits about him—for, as we reached the opening, he saw what I saw: that the opening was the entry to a *cul-de-sac* where, before the house at the dead end, the hansom had stopped and my quarry was paying off the driver.

My cabbie drove straight on past the *cul-de-sac* entry for twenty yards or so before he reined-in. I tipped him liberally and, wishing me luck, he drove off. The hansom reappeared, minus passenger, and jingled away along Southampton Row. I walked to the *cul-de-sac* entry. It bore a wall-plate, dimly discernible: Finch Court. I entered it.

On the left were three small but dignified houses with shallow porches and iron-barred ground-floor windows. On the right were three more houses. All the houses were identical, as was the house that closed the dead end—the house which, I was sure, the man who worried me had entered.

I approached the house with circumspection. Directly in front of it was Finch Court's only streetlamp. The gaslight of the lampstandard made the windows of the house shine blankly. On the front door, in the porch, gleamed the polished brass of a numeral, a letter-slot—and a nameplate. I stole up the two whitewashed steps to the porch. The numeral on the door of the house was 5, the name engraved on the plate was: *George H. Jay.*

I pushed up the flap of the letter-slot, peered through it. Within, all was dark, all silent.

I visited the porches of the other six houses. Striking matches, I examined the nameplates on the doors. I found that here in Finch Court were the premises of two doctors, one dental surgeon, three lawyers, and Mr. George H. Jay—*profession unspecified.*

Deeply thoughtful, I left Finch Court.

"George H. Jay?" said Raffles, when I reported to him, some hours later. "I've never heard of him, Bunny."

With a splitting headache, for I had not had much sleep, I had walked round from my Mount Street flat to Raffles' chambers in the renowned Albany, just off Piccadilly. I had found him, looking enviably fresh and rested, wearing a grey suit, a pearl in his cravat,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

breakfasting in his comfortable living-room.

Frowning over the news I had brought, he told me to help myself to coffee, and he asked, "Was it *me* this Mr. Jay was watching, or was it the lady I was with?"

"The lady with the rubies?" I said. "I can't be sure."

"Let's get one thing clear, Bunny," Raffles said. "I wouldn't lay a finger on that lady's rubies." He took a Sullivan from the cigarette-box on the table. "You and I don't, as a rule, discuss our respective lady friends. But you acted promptly and sensibly last night. You've alerted me to a possible danger. So we'll make an exception. I'll tell you who the lady is."

He told me that a few months previously, at midsummer, he had been invited to join a Cricket Week house party at Castle Cleeve, one of the great country homes in the beautiful Cotswold area of Gloucestershire.

"It was a big party," Raffles said. "There were a lot of important people there—the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the First Lord of the Admiralty—people of that calibre. At these very big parties, it sometimes happens that there aren't enough bedrooms for all the guests. In that case, it's the custom for the married couples to be allotted the bedrooms, and the bachelor guests are billeted, for sleeping purposes, at largish houses in the immediate neighbourhood. I was billeted at a lovely old Elizabethan manor house called Winchcombe Glebe, where my hostess was a Mrs. Diana Rivenhurst, the lady you saw me with last night. We got along very well together."

Mrs. Rivenhurst, Raffles told me, had inherited a large fortune—and Winchcombe Glebe—from her late husband, a man much older than herself.

"Diana's not quite thirty," Raffles said. "Her husband made his pile out of cotton. He owned spinning-mills in Lancashire and was known as a shrewd buyer of the raw material auctioned at the Cotton Exchange, Atlanta, Georgia, where Diana used often to go with him on his business visits, and where, I gather, she received from Southern society a welcome she's never had from such circles in *this* country."

I understood. Because her late husband had been "in trade," certain doors were closed to Diana Rivenhurst, for all her wealth, that were open to A. J. Raffles. I fancied that to be asked by the bigwigs of Castle Cleeve if she could receive for a week at her lovely home one of their guests, who happened to be England's cricket captain,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would not likely have induced hesitation on the part of the beautiful owner of Winchcombe Glebe.

"She was awfully kind to me," Raffles said. "She couldn't have been more considerate. For instance, she owns a motor-car. It's a this year's, 1907, Darracq landaulette. I can't tell you, Bunny, how keenly I came to look forward, every evening, to the moment when the Castle butler would whisper in my ear, 'The chauffeur with the Winchcombe Glebe motor-car has come for you, Mr. Raffles.' Believe me, it was a relief to get away from the endless political and fox-huntin' and pheasant-shootin' gossip, at the Castle, and have an hour or two more or less *tête-à-tête* with Diana. I say 'more or less' because, naturally, there was the usual domestic staff at the Glebe, and of course, with a male guest in the house, a meek aunt also was staying there, by way of chaperone for Diana."

"The chaste Diana," I murmured, vaguely recalling classical studies from my schooldays.

Actually, Raffles told me, it was only once or twice that he had been alone with Diana—just for a nightcap on the terrace, the midsummer nights so magical, the gardens of Winchcombe Glebe spellbound in the moonlight, and the warm air fragrant with the scent of roses.

"She wore one," said Raffles, "in her hair."

His grey eyes remembered how. And, after a moment, he drew in his breath, deeply.

"The week," he said, "came to an end, and we parted—with a regret that, I think I can say, Bunny, was wholly mutual."

"But you were with her last night," I said, "at the Café Royal."

He nodded.

"The London debut of Luisa Tetrazzini," he said, "gave me an opportunity for some small gesture to show my appreciation of Diana's hospitality. I obtained, not without difficulty, three Grand Circle tickets for *La Traviata,* and I wrote to Diana inviting her and her aunt to be my guests for the occasion. They accepted. They motored up to London yesterday in the Darracq landaulette. They're staying at the Cavendish Hotel in Jermyn Street. The motor journey gave the aunt a migraine, which prostrated her, but Diana didn't want to disappoint me, which is why I had her to myself at the Opera—and at the Café Royal for supper."

"What you've told me, Raffles," I said, "perhaps puts a different complexion on what happened last night. The man George H. Jay is a rather impressive figure—in a military kind of way. Could it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be that he knows Diana and has aspirations concerning her?"

"And sees in me a possible rival?" Raffles said. He gave me a grim look. "I'll make a point of finding out."

He always had told me that he would never marry. He held that to do so, when any day he might be exposed as a criminal, would be an act of treachery to the woman. It could cause her great unhappiness. But I was worried. I never had known him so attracted by a woman as he evidently was by Diana Rivenhurst. Personally, what surprised me about her was that, with her beauty and her wealth, she was not already married again.

Almost unconsciously, troubled by the situation, I was drawn to Jermyn Street next afternoon—vaguely hoping, perhaps, to catch another glimpse of the woman who attracted Raffles. I did not see her. But, as I strolled along Jermyn Street, I saw what I knew must be her Darracq landaulette, for it was standing at the kerb before the dignified entrance of the Cavendish Hotel. The chauffeur was at the wheel, reading a newspaper. A hansom also was standing there.

I strolled on by, on the sidewalk opposite the hotel. About fifty yards on, I paused and, affecting an interest in the cravats in a haberdasher's window, looked back at the hotel, hoping to see Diana come out. She did not, but somebody else did. It was George H. Jay.

Tall, ramrod-backed, perfectly dressed, vigorous, he stepped into the hansom, which jingled away, right past me, toward St. James's Street.

I went straight round to Piccadilly, just a few minutes walk away, and found Raffles in his living-room in the Albany. The table was laid for tea, with three cups.

"Raffles," I said, "I've just seen that man Jay again!"

"Have you now," said Raffles. "Well, I've learned a thing or two about him, Bunny. I lunched at my favourite club yesterday, and, oddly enough, I was buttonholed by a fellow member, a stockbroker in the City, who said he felt he should tell me that George H. Jay had been inquiring around, very delicately, trying to find out how much I was worth and in what my capital was invested."

"Your 'capital'?" I said.

"Don't worry," said Raffles. "My tracks are pretty well covered. I don't think Jay's likely to find out anything to my discredit. All the same, as he seems to be spying on me, I've returned the compliment. I've had our friend and invaluable 'fence,' Ivor Kern, put

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one of his snoops on to doing a little spying on Mr. Jay."

"But, Raffles—what *is* Jay?"

"A very confidential person—unique, in fact," Raffles said. "He's a secret agent—for the aristocracy."

I was appalled.

"He seems," Raffles said, "to have invented his own profession. I gather, from my clubman friend, that George Jay was an Army man, a regular, with Captain's rank in a socially-good regiment. Apparently, he got younger officers, sprigs of the nobility, out of scrapes from time to time—scrapes over women, cards, money lenders, the usual sort of thing. The word went around, among gilded youth in trouble: 'Get Jay to handle it.' Their aristocratic families got to hear of Jay—with gratitude. Some of our great families, Bunny, have secrets—skeletons in the cupboard—disgraces of a kind that their family lawyers are neither competent nor would wish to handle."

"Understandably," I said.

"The aristocracy," Raffles said, "pins its faith to three pillars of society—the Church, the Law, and the Army. Jay was not only an Army man, he was one who'd earned in aristocratic circles a reputation for integrity, secrecy, and skill in the handling of damaging imbroglios. With no war of any size on, he could have remained stuck at Captain's rank for a decade. He saw a need and a better chance for himself in civilian life. So Captain George Jay, of the Hussars, resigned his commission and became plain Mr. Jay, profession confidential—his receipt of custom, 5 Finch Court, Southampton Row. And I'd like very much," Raffles said, "to know which of his clients put him on to investigating me."

"When I saw Jay just now," I said, and my heart was thumping, "he was coming out of the Cavendish Hotel in Jermyn Street."

"*What?*" said Raffles.

"He'd probably been in there," I said, my throat dry, "to see a client."

Never before had I seen Raffles so shaken. He drew in his breath, looked at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"She's due at four," he said. "She told me she'd love to see my habitation, here in the Albany, so I invited her and her aunt to tea. They'll be here any minute."

"Then I'd better go."

"No!" Raffles said. He frowned, in thought. "Bunny, your presence here, a stranger to them, might make the conversation a bit stilted,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but I'd like to get *your* impression of Diana. Go into my other room there and leave the door slightly ajar. Don't argue! Go quick! I hear them coming!"

Scarcely had I obeyed him than I heard a knock on his outer door, heard it open, heard the hall porter's voice: "Mrs. Diana Rivenhurst to see you, Mr. Raffles."

"Thank you, Bellairs," said Raffles, adding, as I heard the outer close, "Why, Diana! You're alone?"

"My aunt still has a migraine headache. She's in bed with a cold compress."

"What a shame! But how nice of you to come yourself!"

"I shouldn't have, really. I can only stay for a minute."

"Nonsense! You must have some tea. I've lighted the spirit-stove, the kettle's already singing."

"Well—just one *very* small cup of tea, perhaps."

"Let me help you off with your things."

"I shouldn't, really. But—oh, well—just for a minute or two."

Embarrassed as I was at this unexpected situation, Diana coming alone, I put an askance eye to the door-crack. Raffles was helping her off with her things.

"Ah," he said, "the kettle's boiling. I'll make the tea."

"So *this* is where you live! What a nice room! Such comfortable saddlebag chairs, and so many books and cricket bats and golf clubs and—is that a sword of some kind?"

"A sabre, Diana. I fence occasionally, rapier and sabre, at the *Salle D'Armes* in Covent Garden. It strengthens the wrist for cricket. Tea's ready."

"Would you like me to pour?"

"Please do. You did it so gracefully at breakfast at Winchcombe Glebe."

"Did you like my home?"

"I thought it as enchanting as its hostess."

"What a nice thing to say! And you take one knob of sugar in your tea. I remember that—from your week at Winchcombe Glebe."

"For me, Diana, a very happy week."

"For me, too. It was so nice to have a man in the house."

"Won't you try one of these *éclairs*, Diana? They're from the DuBarry Buttery in Piccadilly."

"Well—just a tiny one." Softly, after a moment: "Arthur?"

I seldom heard Raffles called by his first name or even by his initials. Among men, it was not a thing that was done. To hear him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called "Arthur" by a lovely woman sounded so intimate, so almost uxorious, that my embarrassment became insupportable. I felt I had better leave. I tiptoed to the other door of the room I was in. It was a door by which the Albany rear exit, to Vigo Street, could be reached. But the door was locked.

"Yes, Diana?" I heard Raffles say.

"Do you get lonely sometimes? *I* do. Oh, of course, I know lots of people. And—men—well, quite often they want to marry me."

"Does that surprise you, Diana?"

"Not really, I suppose—to be honest. But—you see—I'm quite well off, but—are *they*? I mean, is it honestly *me* they want to marry? Or is it—well—my money?"

"I see your problem, Diana."

"I think it's managed, this sort of thing, so much better on the Continent. There the financial position of the persons concerned is frankly discussed before any betrothal is entered into. But here, in hypocritical England, a woman often has to—well, just leap in the dark. Oh, I've thought *so* much about this! It must be so awful for a woman who finds she's married a man who has to keep coming to her for money. And it can't be a very nice situation for a man, d'you think?"

"I should imagine not, Diana—though *some* men don't seem to mind."

"Would *you* mind, Arthur?"

"Yes. Very much."

"I knew it! And I'm so glad! Because I'd like to ask your advice about something. May I?"

"Of course."

In the other room, I now was listening—through the door-crack—quite intently. My embarrassment was forgotten.

"Arthur," I heard Diana say, "don't lawyers have a term—'in escrow'—something like that?"

"I think they have some such term, Diana, yes."

"Well, tell me, in your honest opinion, Arthur, d'you think it would be very awful for a woman to suggest to a man who proposed marriage to her that both he and she each place an agreed cash sum in—sort of escrow for an agreed period, however brief, while they—kind of thought things over? Would such a suggestion seem *very* dreadful—coming from a woman?"

"It doesn't seem very dreadful to me, Diana."

"Really? Truly? I mean, for example—suppose *I* were to say to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you, 'Let's each put £5000 in kind of escrow for—let's say a week.' Would you do it?"

"Certainly," said Raffles.

"Then let's," said Diana. "It'd be a kind of—earnest. And such fun! I have an absolutely reliable man of business. He acts only for the *very* best people. He could hold the—sort of escrow money for us. Let's do it, Arthur, just as a kind of dare! *Do* let's!"

"Diana," Raffles said indulgently, "I can refuse you nothing."

"To-morrow afternoon, then? Say, at two o'clock? We'll meet at his office, each of us bringing £5000 in cash to place in his safe-keeping for—yes, let's say just one week. *Could* we? Or would to-morrow be too soon for you, Arthur?"

"Not in the least, Diana."

"Then it's agreed?"

"On one condition—that you have supper with me, *alone,* at the Café Royal to-morrow night."

"I will, I will! Oh, Arthur, I'm so excited! We meet first, then, at 5 Finch Court, Southampton Row—at two o'clock. But now I really must fly. I must get back to my poor aunt."

"Let me help you on with your things. Did you come in your Darracq?"

"Yes, my chauffeur's waiting in Albany Courtyard."

"I'll see you out," said Raffles.

I heard a door open, close. Their voices and footsteps receded. I emerged from my lurking-place. My mind was in a turmoil. As I helped myself to Raffles' whisky, he returned.

"Pour me one, as well," he said. "My need is greater than yours."

"The chaste Diana," I said. "Diana the Huntress! She's madly keen to marry you, Raffles!"

"Not so madly keen, Bunny, that she doesn't first want to see if I can coolly produce £5000 in cash at short notice—as an 'earnest' that I must have much larger private resources to draw on. Obviously, the man Jay's attempts to find out for her what I'm worth have failed, so Diana's trying to find out for herself—in her quaintly feminine way."

"Have you got £5000, Raffles?"

"What an idiotic question, Bunny!"

"Then why, in heaven's name, did you agree to accept her fantastic 'dare'?"

"Because I couldn't do otherwise," Raffles said, "without possible damage to the general belief that I'm 'a sporting gentleman of in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dependent means.'" He gave me a wicked smile. "And because, unwittingly, my prudent Diana provided me with security, of a kind, on which I think I can raise a loan."

"What security?" I said, puzzled.

"One often used in aristocratic circles," said Raffles. "I refer to marriage prospects—specifically, to my own evident prospects of being able to marry the heiress to the Rivenhurst Cottonmills fortune. Drink up, Bunny! We've a call to make."

On the strength of Raffles' golden prospects, our friend and invaluable "fence," Ivor Kern, who always kept large cash sums handy for the purchase of stolen property, produced the £5000 there and then, in the cluttered, gaslit sitting-room over his antiques shop in the King's Road, Chelsea. He was assured that the money was to serve solely as a tangible token of Raffles' "independent means" and, seven days from now, would be refunded intact to Kern.

"I'm easy," said Kern, with his cynical grin. "Make it eight days, Raffles."

This was all very well. But what, I wondered, were Raffles' intentions regarding Diana Rivenhurst? Though I was not present at their meeting at 5 Finch Court, at two p.m. on the morrow, what worried me about the whole situation was that I simply did not know how Raffles really felt about Diana.

Neither, I suspected, had George H. Jay known on the night I had spotted him watching them together at the Café Royal. He may well have had a reason more intensely and jealously personal than a merely business one for wishing to gauge the depth of feeling between his beautiful and wealthy client, Diana Rivenhurst, and that agreeable bachelor, A. J. Raffles, England's cricket captain.

If George Jay, ex-Hussar and now confidential agent to the aristocracy, had had hopes of marrying Diana himself, he now knew—because of her quaint "escrow" notion—what his hopes were worth: namely, zero. With the "escrow" established, she clearly was confident that Raffles would propose to her, and, just as clearly, she intended to say *yes*.

But what were Raffles' own intentions? This was what worried me. I knew his scruples about marriage, but, despite them, I could not forget the tone in which he had spoken of his sojourn as a guest in Diana's lovely home, of the garden there enchanted in midsummer moonlight, and Diana with a rose in her hair.

Even after he had learned that she was having inquiries made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about his financial worth, he had called her only, with a wicked but amused indulgence, "My prudent Diana!" And he would be with her again, to-night, at the Café Royal.

For a moment, I was tempted to go to the Café Royal again myself, and unobtrusively watch them together. But I did not like the idea. I dismissed it. Instead, I took a lady friend of my own to the Alhambra Music Hall, with supper afterwards at Frascati's in Oxford Street, and the following evening, just as I was brushing my topper before going out, Raffles turned up at my flat. His expression was strange.

"I've had tea to-day with Diana and her aunt, at the Cavendish," he said. "I stayed on, talking to Diana, and only got back to the Albany about ten minutes ago. I found a note waiting for me." Frowning, he helped himself to my whisky. "Tell me something. When a man finds that he's no hope of winning a woman he wanted, what does he do—let's say, if he's a Hussar type of chap?"

"Traditionally," I said, "he goes to Africa to shoot lions or find a small war he can get himself shot decently dead in. It's rather expected of him."

"The note I found waiting for me," Raffles said, "was from Ivor Kern. It was to tell me that the snoop he put on to watching George Jay, at my request, reports that Jay left London this evening on the 5:50 train to Newhaven."

"Probably he's gone," I said, "to see one of his aristocratic clients on some business matter."

"Alternatively," said Raffles, "has he gone to board the boat that leaves Newhaven, at nine every evening, for Dieppe? I don't know. But it was after nine when I found Kern's note. And what I *do* know is that there are, or should be, two fat envelopes in ex-Captain Jay's safe. One envelope contains £5000 of Diana's money, the other contains £5000 belonging to Ivor Kern. Bunny, if there's one man in London whose money we dare not lose, it's Kern. He knows too much about us. And what I'm asking myself is: Are those two envelopes still intact in Jay's safe?"

My heart pounded. The gaslight seemed to me to turn with a suddenly uncanny brilliance.

"I intend to find out," Raffles said, his eyes hard. "It shouldn't be difficult. The night's turning misty. By the small hours, it'll be mistier still. Even more to the point—when I saw Jay put those two envelopes into his safe at just after two p.m., day before yesterday, I noted and memorized, by reprehensible habit, his manipulation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the dial. I know the combination of his safe."

Raffles drained his glass.

"If I find the two envelopes there intact," he said, "then there, as far as I'm concerned, they shall remain—intact!"

Terrified yet fascinated as I always was on such an occasion as this, I insisted on accompanying Raffles. Our motive, for once, was guiltless and clearly justified, but that would by no means mitigate the penalty if we should be caught in the act we intended as we went, on foot in the small hours, to Finch Court, Southampton Row.

As Raffles had said, the night was misty. Finch Court's solitary gaslight, on its lampstandard at the kerb of the narrow sidewalk in front of Number 5, at the dead end, was no more than a dim nimbus on the dank vapour. Keeping guard at the entry to the *cul-de-sac,* I could just discern Raffles as, at the dead end, he climbed up the lampstandard. He opened the door of the glass lampcase. He must have pulled the short chain that reduced the gaslight to its daytime pilot jet, a speck of blue not visible to me. Neither, now, was Raffles visible.

My heart pounded. Diana Rivenhurst had called marriage, for a woman, "a leap in the dark." Raffles must now be preparing to make a different kind of leap, also in the dark. He must be pulling himself up so that he could straddle the lampcase and, with his feet on the iron bar that protruded slightly to either side, just under the case, balance himself for an instant upright—then make a flying leap, over the narrow sidewalk, and land on all fours on the roof of the shallow porch of Number 5.

The front door of the house being stout and the ground-floor window barred, the easiest way in was by the upper window. Raffles must now be dealing with its catch. And now he must be cautiously raising the window. And by now, surely, he must be ducking into the room there.

Not a sound could I hear. All was still.

From here at the Finch Court entry, I peered out into Southampton Row. To left and to right the streetlamps, in twin lines, burned wanly in dim, diminishing perspective. Nothing else was to be seen. The throb of the pulse in my ears measured the passing minutes—until, at long last, Raffles joined me, and we walked away from there.

All he told me, as I began to breathe normally again, was that George H. Jay had *not* departed for foreign climes.

"Anything but," said Raffles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something seemed to be amusing him as we walked on. Near the British Museum a late-cruising hansom took us up. Raffles paid off the cabbie in Chelsea. We walked along the King's Road to Ivor Kern's antiques shop. Raffles jerked our signal on the bellpull. Pale of face, Kern opened the door to us. He was in his nightshirt and dressing-gown, with a candlestick in his hand. We went upstairs to his sitting-room, where he checked that the window blinds were down before he lighted the gas, pinched out the candle, turned inquiringly to Raffles.

Raffles said, "When Diana handed Jay the envelope containing her £5000, Jay checked the contents, marked the envelope *Mrs. Rivenhurst,* gave her a receipt, and put the envelope into his safe. With my envelope, which he marked *Mr. Raffles,* he followed the same procedure. Diana said she had some other business to discuss with Mr. Jay, so I left them to it. When I opened that safe tonight, both envelopes were there."

"Thank God for that!" Kern and I said, together.

"But while one envelope had retained its thickness," said Raffles, "the other was unaccountably thin."

"*Which*?" Kern said hoarsely.

"Diana's was the thin one," said Raffles. "I looked in it to see why. It contained only the receipt Jay had given her. She wouldn't have surrendered that receipt unless, after I had left, she had received her money back from Jay. In short, she doesn't trust him with *her* money." A wicked vivacity danced in Raffles' eyes. "My prudent Diana! She'd drawn that £5000 out of her bank account, and I've no doubt that, immediately the money had served her purpose, she put it back into her bank account again."

"But what about *my* money?" Kern croaked.

"In the circumstances, Ivor," said Raffles, "I felt I'd be justified in following Diana's example. She'd taken prudent steps to safeguard *her* money, so I took similar steps to safeguard yours." Raffles laid a fat envelope on the table. "There's your money, Ivor—intact. And I'm now out of your debt, right?"

"Right!"

"And I'm also, of course," said A. J. Raffles pleasantly, "still in possession of Mr. George Jay's receipt for £5000 which I entrusted to him for safekeeping."

Just before ten, next morning, as I was finishing breakfast in my Mount Street flat, Raffles walked in on me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"'Morning, Bunny," he said, helping himself to a cup of coffee. "I've just had another note from Kern, enclosing a telegram from his snoop, who followed George H. Jay to Newhaven. Jay spent the night at a country mansion near Newhaven and caught the 9:30 train back to London this morning. He should be arriving within an hour or so, and will probably take a cab to his office."

"When he opens his safe," I said uneasily, "he'll send for the police!"

"That's the one thing he certainly *won't* do, Bunny. He's a highly fee'd, confidential agent to the aristocracy. There are many documents, no doubt extremely private, in his safe. If his aristocratic clients were to read in the newspapers that Mr. George H. Jay's safe has been robbed, there'd be a number of cerebral strokes suffered by the landed gentry—and Mr. Jay would never be trusted again. Now, come on," said Raffles. "You've been a great help in this matter, so far. You might as well see it through. If Mr. Jay doesn't have a stroke himself when he opens his safe presently, I imagine he'll rush to the Cavendish Hotel to report to his client, Diana. Then either he, or perhaps both of them, will come to the Albany to break the shattering news to me that my £5000 has been stolen. Then it'll be *my* turn to have a stroke. Come on!"

With quivering nerves, I walked round with Raffles, through Berkeley Square, to Piccadilly and the Albany. In his living-room, I could not keep my eyes from wandering repeatedly to the clock on his mantelpiece. The hands seemed to me to move with a glacier-like deliberation. When at last a knock sounded on the door, I almost dropped the bound volume of *Punch* I was pretending to look at.

"Come in," called Raffles, who was pouring us each a glass of sherry.

It was the hall porter who opened the door, announcing, "Mrs. Diana Rivenhurst and Mr. George H. Jay to see you, Mr. Raffles."

"Thank you, Bellairs," said Raffles. "Why, Diana, this is a happy surprise! And Mr. Jay, too? May I introduce Mr. Manders, an old friend and schoolfellow of mine? Do sit down. We were about to have a sherry. You'll join us, of course."

"The matter my client and I have come about, Mr. Raffles," said Jay, tall and commanding of presence, but redder than usual in the face, "is—well, private."

"Oh, Bunny Manders is the soul of discretion," said Raffles. "Diana, you like your sherry medium dry—I remember that, from Winchcombe Glebe. And you, Mr. Jay?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Immaterial," said the ex-Hussar. He fingered his close-clipped, slightly greying moustache. "Mr. Raffles, I had occasion yesterday to visit a client at his country home in Sussex. We dined, discussed our business, I spent the night at his home, and returned to London this morning. On going to my office, I discovered that my safe had been rifled. As you know, there were in it two envelopes belonging, respectively, to Mrs. Rivenhurst and yourself, and entrusted to my safekeeping, for a period of seven days, in connection with a—a joint arrangement, of a—highly personal nature between the two of you. Mr. Raffles, I have to tell you, with profound regret, that one of those envelopes has vanished."

"One?" said Raffles.

"Arthur," Diana murmured, her eyes downcast to her gloves as she removed them, plucking at one finger at a time, "the intruder—somehow—quite overlooked *my* envelope. Isn't that so, Mr. Jay?"

"That is so," muttered the agent to the aristocracy, going very red indeed—so red, in fact, that I realised he was unaccustomed to lying and had forced himself to do so only because his interest in his client, Diana, was a deeply personal one, as I had suspected all along.

He was covering up for her. He swallowed hard.

"Arthur," Diana said to Raffles, "this has been a terrible shock to me. How much more so it must be to you!"

Raffles drew in his breath, deeply.

"It's a bit of a shock, certainly," he admitted. "Still, I'm relieved to hear that *you've* suffered no loss, Diana. As for *my* five thousand—well, I imagine it's covered by Mr. Jay's insurance. Which reminds me, Mr. Jay—your insurance company will probably want to see the receipt you gave me." Raffles opened a drawer of his writing-table. "I think I put it—"

"Mr. Raffles," George H. Jay said heavily, "I carry normal insurance on 5 Finch Court, of course, but the policy, like the policies of most insurance companies, insures everything—*except* money."

Raffles, receipt in hand, looked startled.

"You see, Arthur," said Diana, "how awful it all is?"

"The whole 'escrow' notion," said Mr. Jay, "was a folly, a joint folly by you both. I advised against it, Mrs. Rivenhurst, when you first told me of your unconventional notion. I also told *you,* Mr. Raffles, that I was surprised at your indulging Dia—Mrs. Rivenhurst in her 'escrow' whimsy. I further added, to you both, in my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

office, that I would only undertake to hold the deposits for you on the understanding that I did so *without prejudice* to myself."

"I'm afraid that's true, Arthur," said Diana. "Mr. Jay—"

"My dear Mrs. Rivenhurst," said the ex-Hussar, his manner growing every moment more commanding, "I number among my clients the highest in the land. I am, moreover, privileged to call them my friends. My advice to them, in arranging matters of delicacy, is always: 'Let *me* do the talking!' "

Diana bowed her lovely head.

"Very well," said Mr. Jay. "I'll now take it upon myself to give you both my considered opinion. Your 'escrow' agreement was a *joint* folly. A loss has resulted from it. In my view, the only equitable thing that can be done now is for you *jointly* to share that loss."

Diana looked up quickly, in alarm and surprise, at George Jay.

Raffles said, "I respect your suggestion, Mr. Jay."

My spirits soared. We were going to get £2500!

"But, of course," Raffles added, the receipt in his hand, "I wouldn't dream of allowing Diana to do as you suggest."

He struck a match, set fire to the receipt, tossed it into the grate.

My heart sank. He loved her, then. So £2500 was going up in smoke!

Diana was looking at him with shining eyes. But Mr. Jay had flushed deeply.

"I must say, Mr. Raffles, that your action is consonant," said the agent to the aristocracy, "with everything that my inqui—everything that I've ever heard said of you. You are a gentleman. As one myself, however, I think you're overlooking something. Surely, if you refuse to share your loss with Dia—Mrs. Rivenhurst, you're placing her under an unfair moral obligation to you!"

Diana looked down at her gloves. She was biting her lip, seemingly with some vexation.

"Mr. Jay," Raffles said slowly, "that hadn't occurred to me. H'm!" He frowned, turned to me. "Bunny, as a gentleman and more or less a bystander in this matter, what do *you* think? Let's leave the decision to you."

"Well, frankly, Raffles," I said, trying hard to look reluctant, "I'm obliged to agree with Mr. Jay."

"Then that settles it," said Raffles. "We'll dispose of this unfortunate *money* matter as Mr. Jay, with Bunny Manders' disinterested support, so sensibly advises—shall we not, Diana?"

"I *suppose* so," said Diana.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her tone was sulky. She omitted to call him "Arthur." As for myself, a virtual stranger to her as I was, the look I received from her beautiful eyes when, having written a cheque for Raffles, she took her departure with her adviser, ex-Captain George H. Jay, was little short of lethal.

"I'm afraid, Bunny," Raffles said, as we heard Diana's landaulette departing, with a honk of its horn, from Albany Courtyard, "that the ex-Hussar is in for a difficult half-hour. But his behaviour was very correct. It was in the highest traditions of the Army. No wonder the aristocracy trust him! He certainly made it easy for me to do what I *had* to do—for Diana's own sake."

"Her own sake?" I said.

"As you know," said Raffles, "I have certain scruples about marriage. So, for her own sake, I had to discourage Diana from thinking of myself in that connection. I therefore committed what's clearly, for the prudent Diana, an unpardonable sin. I let myself be persuaded to accept a small part of her great Cottonmills fortune."

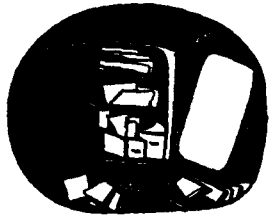
Raffles picked up Diana Rivenhurst's cheque, looked at it thoughtfully.

"£2500 for us to share," I said, elated.

"Yes." Raffles tossed the cheque back on to his writing-table. He shrugged. "Well, that's life, Bunny," he said. "For a small gain, a greater loss."

"Loss?" I said. "Of what?"

"Of an illusion, Bunny. Of an illusion, as old as Eden, about a garden spellbound in moonlight," Raffles said, "and a woman with a rose in her hair."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

As you know, Nick Velvet, the unique thief, steals only the worthless—never anything valuable like money, jewelry, or objets d'art. And for stealing the valueless Nick's fee is $20,000. Well, inflation has finally caught up with Nick. To filch zilch, to pinch pinchbeck, Nick now charges a minimum of $25,000. (Will we ever have a story in which someone offers Nick $1,000,000 for stealing 0? Mr. Hoch, are you listening?) In the meantime, here is one of Nick Velvet's wiliest cases . . .

THE THEFT OF THE BANKER'S ASHTRAY

by ***EDWARD D. HOCH***

The bank's headquarters were on Lexington Avenue, in a great white tower that reached toward the sky. Riding up to the 56th floor in an express elevator, Nick Velvet decided that banks had changed a great deal since his youth when the tellers were all men and the interest rate was four percent. Perhaps the ways of robbing banks had changed too. On the top floor the secretary led him past a computer room where, he imagined, it would be possible to steal $1,000,000 without ever drawing a gun.

Philip Norton's office was different too, done in chrome and glass that would have turned old-time bankers pale. But then Philip Norton was not an old-time banker. Gaunt and graying, but with the handsome demeanor of a politician on the way up, his presence behind the desk was imposing and just a bit intimidating.

"You're Nick Velvet?" he asked motioning toward one of the chrome and leather chairs. "I've heard a great deal about you."

© *1979 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nick smiled and sat down. "I'm curious as to where you heard it. I didn't know my fame had spread to banking circles."

"These days bankers deal with all sorts of people. Everyone who has money becomes a bank's customer in one way or another, and we don't ask too many questions about where the money came from. But that's beside the point. I called you, Mr. Velvet, for some advice. Naturally I'm willing to pay for your time."

"Advice?" Nick asked, not quite knowing what was expected of him. "I have a service business, Mr. Norton. Naturally I assumed you knew the nature of my service."

"I do. You steal valueless objects for a fee of twenty thousand dollars."

"It's twenty-five thousand now. Inflation finally caught up with me."

The banker waved his hand. "In any event, I don't need your services, only your expert knowledge. Something has been stolen from me—something valueless—and I need to know why."

"I'm no detective, Mr. Norton. Quite the contrary, in fact."

"But over the years you must have come in contact with a great many motives for stealing valueless objects."

"What has been stolen?" Nick asked.

"The heavy glass ashtray from my desk."

"Any idea who stole it?"

"Yes—but I don't know why. It disappeared while I was meeting with a religious quack named Parson Maybee. He's the only one who could have taken it."

"What did the ashtray look like?"

The banker shrugged. "Nothing special or in the least bit valuable. You can buy them anywhere. Clear glass, square-shaped, with a concave inside. I'd say it was about five inches square and maybe two inches high."

"Tell me about Parson Maybee."

"His full name is Felix Maybee, and he's the parson of the Church of the One True Hope. They're out on Long Island now but he wants to build a new church. He came to see me about a loan."

"You're the president of First City Savings, aren't you? Don't you have a loan officer for things like that?"

"A mutual friend asked me to see him personally and I agreed. Perhaps it was a mistake. In the end I turned him over to our loan officer, but I'm sure we won't give him anything like the money he wants."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How much did he ask to borrow?"

"A half-million dollars, with no collateral but the name of his church. I'm certain we won't approve it."

"Could he have sneaked the ashtray out under his coat?"

"He must have. Even when I'm not smoking I'm usually fiddling with it while I talk. As soon as he went out the door I noticed it was missing."

"There were ashes in the tray at the time?"

"A few, and perhaps one cigarette butt. I'm trying to cut down on my smoking, and Maybee didn't smoke at all."

"Anything else in it? Torn scraps of paper?"

"No. Nothing."

"Did it have the bank's crest or name on it?"

"No."

"How long ago did this happen?"

"Three days ago. Monday of this week."

Nick leaned back in the chair. "I have no idea how I could be of help, Mr. Norton. My best guess would be that the man's a kleptomaniac. It's probably as simple as that."

"You've never come across anything like this before?"

"No, never. The ashtray has no value to speak of, there was nothing in it, nothing engraved on it. He must have taken it simply because he fancied it and couldn't resist the impulse."

The banker was obviously disappointed. "I thought you could be of greater help to me."

"I wish I could," Nick said. "But as I told you, I'm no detective." He stood up. "Maybe sometime you'll have a job that's a little more in my line."

Philip Norton stood up too. "Very well." He seemed about to say something more, but he hesitated.

Nick had his hand on the doorknob when the banker spoke again. His voice, almost a whisper, barely carried across the room. "Mr. Velvet, I'll pay you twenty-five thousand to steal that ashtray back from Parson Maybee."

Nick Velvet never asked questions as to his clients' motives and he asked none that day. He accepted the assignment as if he'd been expecting it, promised results, and left to look up Parson Felix Maybee. He was not a difficult man to find. A phone call to the Church of the One True Hope on Long Island brought an immediate appointment for that same afternoon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But when Nick arrived at the storefront church shortly before two o'clock, he found more than he'd bargained for. A blonde young woman wearing slacks and a sweater, with a tape recorder dangling from a shoulder strap, was attempting to push her way past a burly man in the doorway. "You don't seem to understand!" she told him while pushing back. "I'm Lawn Larson from Channel Six News. I'm here for an interview!"

"No interviews today, lady," the man said, giving her a final shove that sent her reeling backward a few feet. Nick became aware of a television cameraman recording the whole scene from across the street.

The door slammed shut and the camera stopped filming and Nick stepped up to the young woman. "Not very friendly in there, are they?"

She brushed some imaginary dirt from her sweater and shifted the tape recorder to a more comfortable position. Then she turned on her best smile and asked, "Do you have business with Parson Maybee?" Her microphone came up a few inches to catch his reply.

Nick, who'd had problems with a woman columnist on his most recent assignment, didn't intend getting involved with the press again. "No comment," he answered politely.

"Have you come to see him about the church's tax-exempt status?"

Nick edged by her without replying and the guard at the door let him in. "You got an appointment?" he asked.

"Nick Velvet. Two o'clock."

The guard motioned toward the stairs. "Up there. First office on the right."

Felix Maybee proved to be a stout man with a halo of white hair that gave him the misleading appearance of a benevolent monk. He greeted Nick with a firm handshake and showed him into a plush office complete with a tank of tropical fish. "You spoke on the phone of a possible donation to our worthy cause," he said.

Nick glanced at the desk but there was no evidence of the banker's ashtray. "I represent someone who may be interested. But I was a bit put off by the commotion at the front door. What was all that about?"

The benevolent parson dismissed it with a wave of his hand. "Reporters are always harassing me. Somehow they equate the Church of the One True Hope with those crazy west-coast cults. Nothing could be further from the truth."

"How large a congregation do you have?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Two hundred in this area, perhaps seven hundred nationwide."

"Not too large."

"Our members are filled with missionary zeal. We will have a million converts within ten years, all preaching the gospel of hope through humanity."

Nick wondered what that meant but didn't bother to ask. Instead he casually produced a pack of cigarettes. "Do you have an ashtray?"

"Please, no smoking. It's one of our Church's tenets."

"Sorry." He put away the cigarettes, wondering if that explained the theft of the ashtray. No, it was too bizarre. One didn't steal ashtrays to try to stop people from smoking.

"We have great plans for our Church," Maybee was saying. "And we're always looking for donations and bequests to help in our work."

"If your congregation is growing so fast I'd think soon you'd need larger facilities."

The parson's eyes glistened. "Certainly a new church is very high on our agenda. But the money—"

"Have you tried getting a loan?"

"The banks are reluctant."

"I understand First City Savings in New York has been amenable to such things."

"We have a loan application pending with them now, but I don't hold out much hope for it. I met their president earlier this week. He is not a man who takes comfort in the workings of the Lord."

It was difficult for Nick to judge the man's sincerity. He'd known plenty of con men in his time, and more than one had used religion as a front. Still, there was always a chance that Parson Maybee could be different. Perhaps he'd stolen the banker's ashtray to use in a prayer service. Maybe he even planned to burn incense in it.

Nick departed after a little more conversation, promising to make contact with Maybee in a short time regarding a possible donation. The parson seemed pleased and saw Nick to the door. Outside, crossing the street to where he'd left his car, Nick encountered the young woman he'd spoken to on the way in. Somehow he wasn't surprised that Lawn Larson had waited for him to emerge.

"See?" She held up her hands. "No microphone this time. Will you talk to me?"

"What about?" he asked, unlocking the door of his car.

"Parson Felix Maybee, of course. What's your business with him?"

"That's a private matter."

"He's nothing but a crook, you know."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Judging by his appearance he could be a saint."

"Judging by appearances I could be a hooker, but I'm not. Felix Maybee is under investigation by a half-dozen federal agencies. It's very possible that his tax-exempt status will be lifted. There's evidence that a large share of the contributions to the Church of the One True Hope goes into his pocket."

"He wouldn't be unique in that respect." Nick slid behind the wheel of his car. "You must know the authorities are reluctant to move against any religion, no matter how shady its financial operations."

"That's why it's up to the press to do it," she argued.

"All I can say is good luck." He gave her a smile and pulled away.

Gloria was in the little garden at the rear of their house, planting marigold seeds, when Nick returned home. She brushed the dirt from her hands and stood up as he came into view. "How'd it go with your client?"

"About as usual. He's a banker. I took your advice and raised my fee to twenty-five thousand."

"I should think so! Is it a dangerous assignment, Nicky?"

"Shouldn't be. Just a routine thing."

Since she'd discovered the true nature of his business Gloria never asked too many questions. But she needed occasional reassurance that he wasn't tempting fate too much. "I've started on the garden. It was such a nice day I couldn't stay inside."

"Good idea."

He went in and checked the mail, finding nothing but the usual assortment of ads and bills. One envelope contained a slim catalogue from Star Security Systems. It was part of his job to keep abreast of the latest advances in locks and burglar alarms, and he'd arranged to receive several such mailings. He paused now at a page showing doors and gates on parking areas which could be opened by inserting a magnetized card in a slot. Nick tugged at his lower lip as he read the page. Then he went to the telephone and direct-dialed the New Jersey number that appeared on the catalogue cover.

Nick asked for the sales manager and identified himself with the false name he'd used before. "I was looking over your catalogue, especially some of the new locks that work with magnetic cards and such."

"They're very popular items," the sales manager said.

"I seem to remember reading something about an electronic lock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that could be opened only by a fingerprint. Is such a thing possible?"

"Oh, certainly. A signature, a fingerprint. It's simply a matter of the scanner matching two images. As a matter of fact, a fingerprint match works better than a signature because no one ever signs their name exactly the same way. They have to carry a card with the key signature on it, and that negates the security aspect."

"Do you manufacture fingerprint locking devices?"

"No, they're out of our line and terribly expensive. But I can give you the name of a Toronto firm that's had some experience with them. It's late in the day but you might catch someone there."

It took Nick another half hour and three more phone calls to come up with the information he wanted. Yes, a fingerprint-activated locking device had been sold to First City Savings Bank in New York. That was all the information they could release, but it was enough for Nick. In the morning he would call on Philip Norton once more.

The banker was pleased to see him the following day and came right to the point. "Did you recover my ashtray?"

"No," Nick responded. "But I know why it was stolen."

Norton eyed him suspiciously. "You do?"

"You said yesterday you usually fiddled with it while you talked. Parson Maybee would have noticed your fingers on the smooth glass of the ashtray. He stole it for your fingerprints."

"My—"

"You have something in this building—a door or a vault lock—that can be electronically opened only with your fingerprints."

The banker's face turned ashen. "How do you know that?"

"It's my business to know. You hired me, didn't you?"

"I hired you to get back an ashtray. You have no business snooping into this bank's security system."

"I doubt if the bank's vaults would be controlled by a lock that required your presence each time they were opened. More likely it's a private safe or strongroom for your own use. In a new building as large as this one, almost anything could have been built into it."

Philip Norton placed his hands flat on the desk. "Very well, Mr. Velvet. That will be enough. I no longer need your services."

"But I haven't recovered your ashtray."

"You will cease all efforts on my behalf. Kindly submit an invoice covering your time since yesterday."

"I don't charge by the hour, Mr. Norton."

"Make whatever arrangements you want. But you're no longer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in my employ."

Nick left the building, sorry he'd allowed himself to be so frank with the man. He stood on Lexington Avenue, watching the flow of traffic, wondering what to do next. Obviously he'd been fired by Norton because he mentioned the strongroom with its lock that opened by fingerprints. Norton feared that knowledge, perhaps even feared Nick would use the ashtray to his own advantage if he recovered it.

But Nick wasn't being sidetracked that easily. He'd been hired to steal the banker's ashtray and he intended to do it.

He waited till Sunday morning, when Parson Felix Maybee was busy conducting services for a handful of the faithful in a small rented hall down the street from the church's headquarters. Then Nick went to work, entering the back door of the headquarters building with an ease that showed the parson was not on Star Security Systems' mailing list.

He went quickly to the upper office and began to search. There was nothing in the closet but a filing cabinet full of mailing lists. The desk contained only one surprise—a .38 caliber revolver nestled in the bottom drawer. Nick could hardly have been more startled if he'd found a Bible there.

Finally, after fifteen minutes of frustrating search, Nick stood in the center of the office and turned slowly around. Since Parson Maybee had personally stolen the ashtray Nick felt he'd have hidden it in his private office rather than elsewhere in the building. Downstairs any of his workers or congregation might come upon it. Up here it would be reasonably safe. Still, Maybee was the sort who'd want to keep his eye on it every minute. An ashtray could be hidden in plain sight most places, but not in the office of a parson opposed to smoking. Here something more subtle was called for.

Then he noticed the tropical fish tank once more.

He walked over to it and peered through the glass and water. Then he reached down among the colorful fish and there it was.

Philip Norton's solid glass ashtray, upside down at the bottom of a tropical fish tank. All but invisible.

Nick carefully lifted it out and wiped it off. It was too big for his pocket, so he slipped it inside a folded section of the Sunday newspaper which he nestled beneath his arm. He left the building the way he'd come in, carefully relocking the door behind him.

When he got back to where he'd parked his car he recognized a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

familiar truck in front of him. The Channel 6 news team, on the job. "Hello, there," Lawn Larson called out, catching sight of him.

"Come out to hear the parson's Sunday sermon?"

"Not especially."

"You should have caught it. He's gone legit."

"How do you mean?"

"He just announced to the congregation that First City Savings has approved a half-million dollar loan for a new church."

Nick went down to the bank again on Monday morning, carrying the glass ashtray in his briefcase and looking for all the world like one of the vice-presidents. Philip Norton's secretary first said he'd be tied up with meetings all day, but Nick was persistent. "Tell him I have something very important which can only be given to him personally."

She spoke to Norton on the phone and turned back to Nick. "He can see you in fifteen minutes."

When Nick entered the familiar office Norton greeted him with a cool expression. "What is it, Velvet? I told you our deal was off."

Nick opened the briefcase and set the ashtray on the banker's desk. "One ashtray, as ordered."

Philip Norton sat and looked at it. "Where did you find it?" he asked at last.

"Where Parson Maybee hid it—in a tropical fish tank in his office."

"The fish tank!"

"Sounds as if you took a look yourself."

"I've been out there, yes."

"Too bad the bank went for that half-million loan before I had a chance to recover this for you."

Norton's face reddened. "That loan had nothing to do with the theft of my ashtray."

"What is this door that your fingerprints unlock? What's behind it, Mr. Norton?"

"Good day, Mr. Velvet. Our business is at an end."

"Not quite. You owe me twenty-five thousand dollars."

"I told you the deal was off. Your delivery came too late."

"Nothing was said about a time limit. I delivered in less than a week's time."

"Sorry, Velvet."

"I'm not leaving without my money," Nick said, but the banker must have anticipated trouble. Almost at once, in answer to some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silent alarm, the door behind Nick opened and a uniformed guard entered.

"Show Mr. Velvet out," Norton said.

Nick stood up. "I'll send you a bill," he said and walked out with the guard.

All the way down in the elevator he thought about it. The situation was not unlike that in the old Gothic novels—a hidden room with a nameless secret that must be kept locked away. Except that this hidden room wasn't in a cliffside mansion but in a 56-story Lexington Avenue building.

Parson Maybee had learned the secret, or at least he'd acquired the key to unlocking the secret. That had earned him a half-million dollar loan for a new church. There was little doubt in Nick's mind now that Maybee was something of a con man, but the jury was still out on whether Maybee or Norton was the bigger villain of the piece. Whichever was the case, it began to look as if Nick would never collect his fee—not unless he could pull off an especially tricky maneuver.

He thought that was something he just might be able to do, with a little help from Lawn Larson.

She listened carefully as Nick talked, chain-smoking the cigarettes she wasn't allowed on camera. "Let's get this straight now. You want me to do an interview with Philip Norton, the president of First City Savings?"

"That's right," Nick said. "In his office at the bank. It must be in his office. I'm sure you can arrange that."

"What's in this for me?"

"A story. A damn good story, if my suspicions are correct. At the very least you'll be following up on the Parson Maybee thing. After all, it's Norton's bank that's granting the loan."

"You've convinced me," she decided after a moment's thought. "But where do you fit in?"

"I'm going along," Nick said with a smile. "Find a job for me."

"That's impossible. The union—"

"Nothing is impossible."

By Wednesday, Lawn Larson had arranged the interview, and Wednesday afternoon she arrived at Norton's office with a cameraman and a sound technician. The latter was Nick Velvet, wearing a wig and a bushy mustache that hid his mouth. It was not an ideal disguise, but he relied on the fact that with Lawn in the room the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

banker wouldn't be looking at anyone else.

"I really don't have much time, Miss Larson. Just what did you want to ask me?"

"It's about the loan your bank is making to Parson Felix Maybee's Church of the One True Hope."

"I can't discuss decisions of the loan department."

"But isn't it true that you personally approved the application?"

"The church is a tax-exempt religious institution. As long as it remains so there's no reason to deny the loan."

"Will you say that on camera?"

He looked distastefully at the man with his shoulder-mounted television camera and shrugged. "Sure. I have nothing to hide."

They started filming, and Nick busied himself with the sound equipment. Even when he leaned over Philip Norton's desk to adjust a microphone the banker never gave him a second look.

By the time they packed up and left, twenty minutes later, the banker's glass ashtray was safely stowed in the box with the sound equipment.

Nick telephoned the bank later that same afternoon. When Norton came on the line, Nick said, "You can have your ashtray back when you pay my bill. That's twenty-five thousand, in case you've forgotten."

"Velvet! How in hell did you—?"

"I should charge double, since I had to steal it twice."

"Keep the damned ashtray! It can't hurt me now."

"Don't be too sure," Nick said, and hung up.

The following morning he went once again to Parson Maybee's office on Long Island. The monkish minister received him with a smile, rubbing his pudgy hands together in anticipation of the contribution to come. "Happy to see you again, Mr. Velvet. Have you discussed the donation with your client?"

Instead of answering, Nick strode over to the tropical fish tank. "Water level seems down a bit from last week," he observed.

"What?"

"As if something had been removed from the tank."

Maybee eyed him suspiciously. "Just who are you, Velvet?"

"I'm the man who took Philip Norton's ashtray from your fish tank."

The parson dove for his desk drawer, but Nick was too fast. His foot kicked the drawer shut, catching Maybee's wrist in it and bring-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing a yelp of pain. "You won't need that pistol, parson. I'm after Norton, not you."

"What do you want?" Maybee asked when Nick had freed his hand.

"Information. You used the ashtray to force Norton into approving the loan for your church."

"I wouldn't put it quite that strongly." He was rubbing his wrist and looking frightened.

"I want the full story, and if I don't get it I'm going to the press with what I know. I'm sure that TV reporter, Lawn Larson, would be interested in learning about the secret vault which can be opened only by Philip Norton's fingerprints."

"How do you know that?"

"It's my business to know things."

The parson pondered his position. "Are you accusing me of some impropriety?"

"Only stating the facts. If blackmail is an impropriety, then I guess I'm accusing you of it."

Maybee hunched over his desk. "Let me tell you something—he's guilty of a hell of a lot more than I am!"

"What, for instance?" Nick asked. He knew he had the man now.

"Last year a woman joined our church—an elderly widow looking for salvation. We get 'em all the time. If I was running this church in California I'd be after the kids, but here in New York it's the rich old widows you go after. Only this time I discovered somebody had gotten to her first."

"Philip Norton?"

A nod. "He got friendly with her, see? He was her banker, and a handsome devil besides. Her husband had left some things, mainly a collection of rare coins and stamps valued at more than one hundred thousand dollars. She wanted them to go to her children after she died, but not before. The problem was what to do with them. Around the house they weren't safe from thieves, and in a safe-deposit box they'd be found and taxed when she died. Her banker Philip Norton provided the perfect solution. As a close personal friend as well as her financial adviser, he offered to keep the collection in his private vault at the bank, and to pass it on to her heirs after her death, thus avoiding both inheritance and gift taxes. Since she trusted him completely, it was a perfect solution. He placed a letter in his files identifying the collection as her property—in case he died first, he said—but he was careful not to give her a copy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She told me she never asked for one."

"So why did you want his fingerprints on that ashtray? Could you have gained access to the vault in that closely guarded building?"

"Probably not," Maybee admitted. "But it was enough to scare the hell out of him. He knew that I knew, so he gave the word to approve my loan."

"All because of this widow's coin-and-stamp collection?"

"She wasn't the only one. I discovered another widow who gave him her silverware and some valuable jewelry for safekeeping. All off the record. Nothing in the safe-deposit boxes. It was a private bank within a bank. I'll bet that vault of his looks like a treasure house."

"The government would certainly frown on such activities," Nick said. "So would the bank's stockholders. He'd be out on his ear in a minute."

The parson nodded, smiling. "So maybe it was blackmail and maybe not. Who's to judge?"

Nick simply shook his head. "A couple of con men, each of you trying to outsmart the other. Except, of course, that we don't know if Norton was pulling a con. Maybe he'll pass the collection on to the woman's heirs when she dies."

Parson Maybee's smile broadened. "She did. And he didn't."

"The woman died?"

"A month ago. And he's made no effort to contact the heirs. I know because I asked."

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

"I had no proof for anything like that. It seemed better to handle it my way."

"Listen," Nick said suddenly. "I've got the ashtray back. I'd returned it to Norton but he didn't pay me, so I stole it again. We're going to use it to get into that private vault."

"There won't be any fingerprints on it now. He wouldn't be that dumb!"

"No, I don't expect any prints."

"Then how will we get into the vault?"

"Philip Norton is going to open it for us."

The first thing Nick had to determine was the location of the vault. The Toronto alarm firm was no help, but the New York company which had erected the building had blueprints still on file. For a small bribe to the right person, Nick got to spend an hour alone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with them. There were no vaults shown on the 56th floor, where Norton's office was located, but there was a small strongroom about the size of a walk-in closet on the floor below. Checking the building directory, Nick found that floor was given over to a secretarial pool. It was unlikely they would need a vault.

"You know what to do?" Nick asked Parson Maybee as they arrived at the building the following morning.

"I know, but I don't like it. You're getting me in too deep."

"You were in pretty deep already, Parson. If this stunt gets Lawn Larson off your back you should be grateful."

"Yes, where is she? I thought you said she was in on this."

"She'll turn up when she's needed." They took the elevator to the 55th floor and Nick followed the blueprints' directions to the electrical fuse box. "The alarm system should tie into this," he said.

"How do you know his private vault has an alarm?"

"In a bank like this everything has an alarm."

"You tamper with the fuses and you'll set it off," Maybee warned.

Nick smiled. "That's the idea."

Philip Norton was in the midst of a branch managers' meeting when his secretary brought him the word. "The alarm's gone off on fifty-five, sir. Someone's tampering with your private vault."

Norton was annoyed. "Get the security men up there."

She returned after a few moments. "It appears that someone's locked in the vault, sir."

"That's impossible! No one could have entered it without—" He glanced around the table at the faces of his branch managers. "Please excuse me, gentlemen. Some business that needs tending to." He hurried out of the room, following his secretary to the elevator.

On the fifty-fifth floor the secretarial pool was in wild disorder. An alarm bell was still ringing somewhere in the distance as Norton strode past the offices to his private vault. When he reached it, out of sight of the other employees, he found two security guards standing with Parson Felix Maybee. "What in hell are you doing here?" Norton demanded.

"Velvet's in the vault!" Maybee exclaimed, pointing to the familiar glass ashtray on the floor. "He lifted your fingerprint from that and used it to open the door!"

Norton turned to one of the guards. "Shut off that alarm bell! Did you see him get locked in?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The guard shook his head and Maybee said, "When he heard the guards coming, Velvet tried swinging the door shut from inside. Somehow it locked on him."

"I don't see how that could happen," the banker muttered, staring at the door.

"You'll have to open it," one of the security men said, drawing his pistol.

"It'll be a pleasure," Norton responded. "I'll see Velvet rot in prison for this stunt. There's no way he can beat a bank robbery indictment."

The banker stepped to the strongroom door and placed his right thumb against a small square of glass. As he pressed in, the electronic gear was activated and his fingerprint was matched against the print on file in the computer's memory unit. There was a low hum and the steel door clicked open. Norton swung it open the rest of the way, carefully shielding himself from the possible line of fire.

The little room was empty.

"Looking for me?" Nick asked, stepping out from behind the banker.

"Where—?" Norton's face had suddenly drained of color.

"I was hiding in the next office. It was just a trick to get you to open the door. I wouldn't want to be guilty of such a thing myself."

Norton turned on Parson Maybee. "You lied to me! You said he was inside!"

"I might have given that impression," Maybee conceded.

Surrounded by the guards and some girls from the secretarial pool, Norton began to recover his composure. "All right, Velvet. You can see I have nothing to hide. The so-called private vault of mine is empty. There's nothing at all inside."

Nick looked past him and saw that it was true. There were shelves on either side, like those in a walk-in closet, but they were all empty. Philip Norton's dark secret was nothing at all.

"That's good enough for me," Nick said. Then, raising his voice, he called. "This way, Lawn. Right in here!"

Suddenly Lawn Larson appeared, charging in from the direction of the elevators with her cameraman and sound technician. "What have we got, Nick?" she asked, peering into the vault.

"An empty room. Film away, and get it on your six o'clock news. I've got a story to go with the pictures."

Philip Norton's jaw dropped.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's this? What can you do with pictures of an empty vault?"

"Just the opposite of what Maybee was planning to do," Nick admitted. "He wanted that ashtray so he could break in and steal the treasures you had here—or at least threaten to steal them. I simply want to show that the treasures no longer exist. A lot of wealthy widows are going to watch the news tonight and wonder what happened to their jewelry and silverware and coin collections. You'll have some explaining to do in the morning."

Norton dropped his voice. "Damn it, Velvet, call off this woman! I'll give you your fee!"

"Right now. In cash."

"Agreed."

Nick smiled and waved his hand. "That's enough, Lawn. End of photo opportunity."

Nick left the bank twenty minutes later with the money in his pocket. Two hundred and fifty hundred-dollar bills, still in their bank wrappers, withdrawn from Norton's personal account. Lawn Larson was at his side, shaking her head. "I saw it but I still don't believe it! He actually gave you money!"

"An overdue fee on a business deal."

"He'll probably call the police and say you stole it."

"Not when he handed it over in front of witnesses."

"Does he think paying you off will keep me from using the story?"

"He may have gotten that impression," Nick admitted. "He's a bad one for jumping to conclusions."

"Where does Maybee fit in?"

"He can fill you in on what was supposed to be in that vault. Treasure from a lot of wealthy widows who trusted their banker."

"I can't believe the president of First City Savings would stoop to defrauding widows."

"No one could believe it, and that's how he got away with it. Check out his personal life and you might find he was in financial trouble—maybe using bank assets to secure personal loans. Whatever the case, he probably sold all that stuff the widows left in his private vault. It took a crook like Maybee to think him capable of it."

"And a crook like you to outwit him?"

"Something like that," Nick admitted. "But leave me out of your story. I don't much like publicity."

He left her there in front of the bank, but all the way home it still bothered him that he'd stolen the ashtray twice for only one fee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified MARKET PLACE

ELLERY QUEEN—is published 14 times a year. The rate per word for CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS is $1.00—payable in advance—minimum ad $15.00. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue, please send order and remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Director, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

BECOME COMMISSION MAILER. How? Write: Grahams, DPBX 99371, Tacoma, WA 98499.

AUDIO TAPE

OLD RADIO PROGRAMS. Free tape catalog. Radio Memories, Box 56-T, California, MD 20619.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMB, 84 Fifth Avenue, New York 10011.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

NEW Car Free Yearly! Details! Supercar, Box 28101, St. Louis, Missouri 63119.

AVIATION

ANTIGRAVITY PROPULSION DEVICE! Free Brochure. RDA, Box 873, Concord, NC 28025.

BIG MAIL

SAVE Postage! Your Mailbox Flooded with Samples, Offers. $2, SASE. VAL-U-CORP, Box 234, Mercer, Wisconsin 54547.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

LARGE Catalog Free! Mystery-suspense books: Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

Next four mystery catalogues, $1.00. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 15070, Orlando, FL 32808. Also search service.

FREE CATALOGUES, hardbacks, paperbacks. Search Service, Detective Mystery Booksearch, Box 15460, Orlando, Florida, 32808.

FREE List! Used hardcover mystery detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, 251 Baldwin Avenue, Meriden, CT 06450.

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS — Cont'd

LOVE a Mystery? Free Mystery-Detective book list. Mystery-House, Box 4235, Reading, PA 19606.

BOOKS—Recent & Out Of Print. G & M Books, Pine Hill, Ogunquit, ME 03907.

FREE Sample List. Mystery Fiction. Hardcovers, paperbacks, magazines, pulps. Steve Lewis, 62 Chestnut, Newington, CT 06111.

MYSTERIES, new/used, British/American/Canadian. Free catalogs. Grant Thiessen, Box D-86, Neche, ND 58265.

AMERICAN ATHEIST Magazine, monthly journal of Atheist news and thought. Sample issue $1.00, $20.00 a year. P.O. Box 2117, Austin, TX 78768.

FREE List. Mystery-Detective Hardcovers, Paperbacks. Bengta Woo, One Sorgi Court, Plainview, NY 11803.

HOW TO GROW YOUR OWN TOMATOES SUCCESSFULLY. $5.95 postpaid. CHASSE, 41E Sixth, Dover, NH.

THE Last Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe—M. Meyers Publisher's Edition, Lippincott, Fall 1978. Retail $8.95. Send $6.50: OL Beckwith (EAP), P.O. Box 328, Wharton, NJ 07885.

MYSTERY Search Service—Back Issue EQMM, AHMM, out-of-print paperbacks, hardcovers. Catalogue 75¢, Send want lists to Richard Chalfin, 118 W. 72nd St., N.Y., NY 10023, Apt. 104.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

100% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC, Box 1904-DG, Sebring, FL 33870.

STAY HOME! EARN BIG MONEY addressing envelopes. Genuine offer 10¢. Lindco, 3636-DA, Peterson, Chicago 60659.

MAKE $1.00 Each Addressing Envelopes. We pay postage. No Limit. Beginners Kit $2.00. Colossi, Box 318-D, Brooklyn, NY 11204.

MORE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$480 Weekly Possible. Amazing New Mailing Program. Details, Rasmussen DP20, 1747N, 450E., Ogden, Utah 84404.

MAILORDER opportunity! Start profitable home business without experience or capital. Write for free book and details. No obligation. Gil Turk, Dept. 501, Montvale, NJ 07645.

$534.00 WEEKLY working three hours daily at home. $356.00 weekly working two hours daily. $178.00 weekly working one hour. Start immediately. Paid daily (advance)—$106.80, $71.20 or $35.60. WRITTEN EARNINGS GUARANTEE. FREE Bulletin/Application. FAS, Postal Unit 13703-G, San Antonio, Texas 78213.

$58.90 TOMORROW, $353.88 NEXT WEEK. GUARANTEED. FREE REPORT. AAHIP, UNIT 29309, MEDCENSTA, TX 78229.

BIG INCOME—short time—details send sase and $2.00—Box 490, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067.

$2000.00 Monthly mailing commission circulars. Experience unnecessary. Free details. American, 1108 Colonial, Inkster, MI 48141.

CASH ADVANCE $500/Thousand envelopes stuffed available. No Limit! Information: Rexson 36-02, Box 1060, Orangepark, FL 32073.

FREE INFLATION-BEATER BOOK "2042 Unique, Proven Enterprises." Fabulous "Little Knowns." Work home! HAYLINGS-E14, Carlsbad, California 92008.

$480.00 WEEKLY! "Guaranteed Home Mailing Program." Freedom, Box 30224-DP, Denver, Colorado 80230.

$500.00 Monthly clipping newspaper items. Experience unnecessary. Free details. Retail, 1108 Colonial, Inkster, MI 48141.

EASY home income stuffing envelopes. Write: Tigo, Box 20535, Portland, OR 97220.

PART time, full time income. No investment. Details: Dept. 64, United Association Manufacturers' Representatives, 808 Broadway, Kansas City, Missouri 64105.

HOMEWORKERS! Easy $200 sparetime! $4,000.00 weekly possible! Opportunities, Box 10X, Penacook, NH 03303.

COINS, CURRENCY & TOKENS

$11.00/Coin Silver! Nation Galleries, 62837.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

FREE GIFT catalog! UNIQUE gifts from around the world. Gifts, Box 11588-QM, Spokane, WA 99211.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $15.00 for 12 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1855 G.P.O., New York, NY 10001.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

SURPLUS JEEPS-$19.30! — CARS-$13.50! — 650,000 ITEMS!—GOVERNMENT SURPLUS — MOST COMPREHENSIVE DIRECTORY AVAILABLE TELLS HOW, WHERE TO BUY — YOUR AREA-$2 — MONEYBACK GUARANTEE — "GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES," DEPARTMENT NF-2, BOX 00249, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94109.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487 Anaheim, CA 92805.

INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTIONS, patents, wanted cash, royalty. Auto, electro-mechanical, mechanical devices, Housewares, etc. We develop, finance, manufacture and market from an idea to perfected product. Free evaluation and brochure. Request Kit DP, Pixonic Corporation, 22 Walter Street, Pearl River, NY 10965.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 'OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 29263-SN, Indianapolis, IN 46229.

QUICK $CASH$ Signature loans! Advise amount & purpose. National, 507-DG Fifth Ave., New York 10017.

MAGIC TRICKS, JOKER NOVELTIES & PUZZLES

FREE!! $2.00 trick with huge magic catalog. All for 50¢. "Superdeal." Rush! Abracadabra-QE, Scotch Plains, New Jersey 07076.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY . . . NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP, ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

MISCELLANEOUS

FABULOUS Gems for Jewelry, Collecting. Gemcutter to You! Save! Taylor's 113-A Martin, Indian Harbor Beach, FL 32937.

SAVE TO 90% WEEKLY on groceries!! Guaranteed!! Information: Rush self addressed stamped envelope plus 25¢! Martens Ent., 1046 Greenwood Ct., Rm. 7DPG, Oshkosh, WI 54901.

TURN your living room into a greenhouse. Increase all plant production 91%. Free report. Write Jan, Box 362, Durant, OK 74701.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

WIN BIG playing poker. New booklet. Simple, powerful, proven. $3.00 Guaranteed. V&M, 131D Carroll St., New Britain, CT 06053.

$300 WEEKLY SPARE TIME – Mailing Salesletters. Details. Thomas, Dept.-D, Box 11773, Charlotte, NC 28220.

STUFF-MAIL ENVELOPES!! $250.00 Profit per thousand possible! Offer-details Rush stamped addressed envelope: Worldwide-A460, X15940, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls" Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send $1.50 (plus 25¢ for postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

EASY HOMEWORK PLAN. Stuff circulars. Big $$$. Write: A&I, 5343-A Diamond Hts., San Francisco, CA 94131.

$500 Cash advance available. Stuff 1000 envelopes. Information. Dept. H, Box 1489, Spring, Texas 77373.

$1,000 Monthly Possible Mailing Commission Circulars. Send self-addressed stamped envelope to Edna-Loy Associates, P.O. Box 8034, Cincinnati, Ohio 45208.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

SELL Words! If you can read and write simple English, Von Hoelscher will show you how to make real money! Free information. Publishers, Box 546-BB, El Cajon, CA 92022.

MAKE money writing and selling simple information. Falconer, Box 20102-D, Indianapolis, IN 46220.

PERSONAL

FOR Free details concerning Canada's Fabulous Government Lotteries—Write Davis #232-2025 W. 42, Vancouver, Canada V6M 2B5.

PROFITABLE OCCUPATIONS

AMAZING! $265,000 yearly with classified ads. Free proof, sase, Moneycraft, 2316 Dale St., Ceres, CA 95307.

RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

SHERLOCK ON CASSETTES: The Noble Bachelor; Five Orange Pips; Scandal in Bohemia. $6.50 each. Massachusetts residents add 33¢ tax. SBI Publishers in Sound, South Lee, MA 01260.

TREASURE FINDERS—PROSPECTING EQUIPMENT

GOLD! over $350/oz. Prospecting over old gold producing regions may prove profitable once again. Find out where these areas are now by ordering the GOLD STRIKE letter. Send $2.50 to GOLD STRIKE, Box 203, Sargeant, GA 30275.

For Greater Advertising Savings
...Results...and Profits...

Place your ad in one of our SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.
For further information write to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Director,
Davis Publications, Inc., 229 Park Ave So., New York, NY 10003.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How to order Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

To: Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,
P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, CT 06830

☐ Bill me $6.97 for 6 issues (outside U.S.A. $8.00)

☐ By paying now I receive 7 issues for $6.97 (outside U.S.A. $8.00)

I prefer to use my MASTER CHARGE or VISA card and take advantage of the longest-term, CASH-ONLY BARGAIN . . .

☐ 14 issues for $13.94 (outside U.S.A. $18.66)

Credit Card # _____

Expires _____ Signature _____

☐ Enclosed is $13.94 (outside U.S.A. $18.66)

Name (please print) _____

Street/No. _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first copy.

H0B116

Special Introductory Subscription To
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

For the first time, new readers are offered this shortest-term, get-acquainted subscription to one of the most entertaining magazines in the mystery field.

No one but the Master of Suspense guarantees you so many unnerving and delightful hours of suspenseful reading!

☐ Bill me $4.98 for 5 issues.

☐ Enclosed is $4.98
(Outside U.S.A. & poss., $6.00)

I prefer to use my MASTER CHARGE or VISA credit card; however, only longer terms are available:

☐ Send me 14 issues for ONLY $13.97 (outside USA $16.35)

Credit card # ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Expiration date _____ Signature _____

NAME _____ (Please print)

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Box 2640 Greenwich, CT 06835

Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first copy.

H0B124

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1.

Now you can get the 15 best-selling thrillers on the outside cover for only $1.00. These books cost $129.35 in the original publishers' editions—but to introduce you to The Detective Book Club, we'll send you all of these superb mysteries in five handsome hardbound triple volumes (shown in the coupon) for only $1.00.

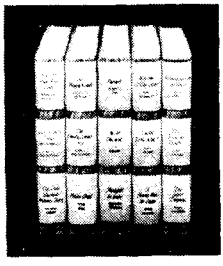
As a member, there is no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. And you may cancel your membership at any time, without penalty or hurt feelings.

Save at least $5 on every mystery you read.

When you accept a club selection, you get three unabridged detective novels in one hard-cover triple-volume for only $5.39 (or about $1.79 for each novel). That's at least $5 less than one mystery costs in the publisher's original edition. The club's editors select the best from some 400 mystery books each year. Selections include new thrillers by the authors in your first 15 books, plus Len Deighton, Dick Francis, and many more.

Mail the coupon now to get your fifteen mysteries for $1. The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576.

FILL OUT COUPON. CLIP ALONG DOTTED LINE. THEN MAIL



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my five triple-volumes shown here, containing fifteen mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all five volumes for the special new member price of only $1, plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections but I am not obligated to accept them. I will always have at least ten days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the club's expense for full credit. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $5.39, plus shipping. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

The Detective Book Club, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576

Name _____ OFT

Street _____ D11L1C

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Ontario, offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR $1.

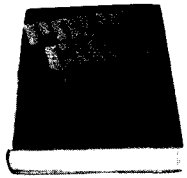
WAIT FOR WHAT WILL COME by Barbara Michaels (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

LEW ARCHER: PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR by Ross Macdonald (Publ. Ed. $10.00)

THE LAST SHERLOCK HOLMES STORY by Michael Dibdin (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

THE BAYOU ROAD by Mignon G. Eberhart (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

THE EMPTY COPPER SEA by John D. MacDonald (Publ. Ed. $8.95)



POLICE CHIEF by John Ball (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

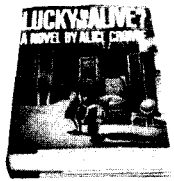
IN AT THE KILL by E. X. Ferrars (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

PURSUIT by Robert L. Fish (Publ. Ed. $10.00)

WELCOME TO THE GRAVE by Mary McMullen (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

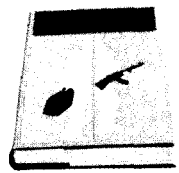
MAIGRET IN EXILE by Georges Simenon (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

REINCARNATION IN VENICE by Max Ehrlich (Publ. Ed. $9.95)



LUCKY TO BE ALIVE? by Alice Cromie (Publ. Ed. $9.95)

A SHARP RISE IN CRIME by John Creasey (Publ. Ed. $7.95)



THE SAINT IN TROUBLE by Leslie Charteris (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

THE SILVER DOLPHIN by Velda Johnston (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

See Inside Cover for Details.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED